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CHRISTIAN
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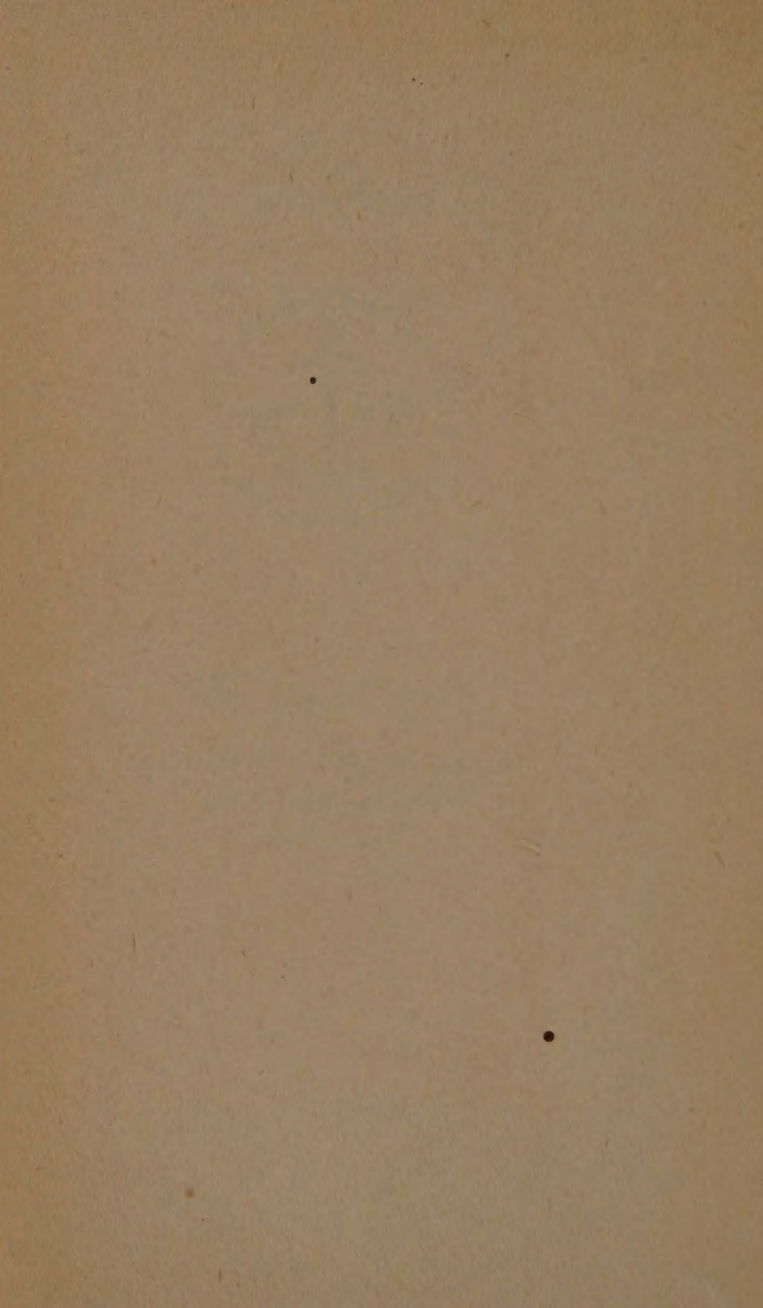
BY
J. G. GREENHOUGH, M.A.



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CHRISTIAN FESTIVALS AND ANNIVERSARIES

BY

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CHRISTIAN FESTIVALS AND ANNIVERSARIES

THE FEAR OF HUMILITY AND GROWTH

(New Year)

“While He thus spake, there came a cloud and overshadowed them: and they feared as they entered into the cloud.”—LUKE ix. 34.

THAT hour upon the mountain was for these three disciples the most wonderful hour of their lives. The memories which it left remained forever fresh, vivid, powerful. Long years after, when their hair had become white with age, they spoke, as if it were but yesterday, of the voice which they had heard in the Holy mountain, and of the glory which they had beheld there as of the only-begotten of the Father. At first they seem to have been almost overpowered with joy—that vision of their Master, with His white and lustrous garments, and face radiant with a beauty not of earth, and of the celestial visitors who talked with Him, lifted them off their feet, and made them feel as if Heaven’s

gates had opened and taken them in. Lord, it is good for us to be here, they cried. Whether it was a dream or a reality, it was so lovely that they wished it might continue. And even as they spake the word, a cloud of very glory descended upon them and hid their Master's face behind a veil of light, and they wondered what new thing was coming, and their hearts began to beat with fear. Was it the cloud that made them fear? No ; it was the whole scene. The novelty of the experience, the grandeur of the revelation. Their Master had been lifted up and unveiled and shown to them as divine. They had discovered that He was a far greater and more wonderful being than they had heretofore thought. They saw Him in a new aspect, in a new relationship. It was the beginning of another life for them. Everything was changing, and their feelings towards Him must henceforth be more reverent and worshipful. Their discipleship was assuming a profounder meaning. The work to which He had called them, and for which He was preparing them, seemed to spring up suddenly into greater magnitude. And they felt concerning themselves a trembling humility, a sense of unfitness, an anxious questioning as to whether they would be sufficient for these things. He was plainly calling them to another and higher service. The old thoughts and experiences were being left behind, and a world of new duties and new hopes stretched before them, all strange, unknown, mysterious. This it was, or something like this,

which flung a dark shadow over their joy and sent a quiver of fear through their questioning hearts. It was a cloud of glory that came down upon them; it wrapped them around with heaven's own light. It was beautiful and not terrible; it was full of promise and of hope. Yet they feared as they entered into the cloud.

I think you will easily understand it, my friends. Your own experience in many a critical hour of life, in many an hour of change, will enable you to enter into their feelings. We cannot face new scenes, undertake new duties, or stand upon the threshold of some new world, without a sort of trembling hesitancy and fear. At least, that is so with all who have had much experience of life. The very young, perhaps, know little or nothing of this dread. They regard every change that awaits them with feelings of happy anticipation and welcome. They step forward gaily to meet that which is coming. All that wears the aspect of novelty seems to them laden with hope and promise. They are sure that school days will be better than nursery days, and business days better than school days, and the larger world beyond better than the confined world which they are quitting, and all new things better than the old. But with those of riper years, changes are awaited with less of jubilant confidence and something of fear. When we are told to go forward, we tremble like the Israelites, wondering whither that forward march will lead us, and hesitating because

we have not trodden that way heretofore. We feel that we are going on, like Abraham, towards some undiscovered country which God has promised to shew us in due time, but which is at present all hidden and strange and dubious. We cannot go forward without forsaking the old landmarks and losing sight of many things which we have loved. That which we have been sure of has to be abandoned for that which is yet to be proved. We have to let go that which we have leaned upon and to fling out our hands like feelers in the darkness for something yet unseen that will support us in its stead. And all this brings a sort of shivering dread. There is a natural instinct of conservatism in the human heart, which makes it cling hard to all its old habits, supports, and reverences, even though they are confessedly very imperfect. For they at least have been tried, and life has jogged on fairly well by the aid of them. And we do not know what things will be given in exchange, and are not sure that they will be really better. We hold on to the bird in the hand, though it be but a common thrush, for those birds in the bush, albeit they sing a sweeter song and have finer plumage, are not yet caught, and they may lead us a very long and wearying chase and not be caught after all. Thus we draw back with a sort of fear when we are bidden to go forward.

Nay, even when we are sure that we are going to something better—when the cloud which we are entering is a cloud of glory, and we enter it full of

courage and joy—still there is a certain fear mingled with our joy. Wherever life summons us to new responsibilities, to larger privileges and duties, even to larger honours, we have a few hours of sensitive shrinking, of modest distrust of ourselves and our powers. No true and good man ventures on any new enterprise, or makes any important change in his habits and professions, without a sort of quivering hesitation. No thoughtful man passes from a life of religious indifference to one of earnest and consistent godliness without long days and hours of struggling with himself and battling with his fears and anxious doubt as to whither this new course will lead him. No religious man undertakes any new service which will enlarge his experience and increase his usefulness without tremors of heart and certain nervous palpitations. Then shall thine heart fear and shall be enlarged, says the prophet. A certain wise and profound and sober self-distrust is an essential element in all noble progress and holy endeavour. He who does not kneel low and tremble before new responsibilities will never bear them bravely or discharge them well. He who does not shrink back with humble diffidence from an appointed path will never go forward in it with steadfast loyalty and unswerving fidelity. The arrogance which never doubts itself will never be quite master either of itself or its weapons. There is something in all good and true lives like the timid shrinking which the maiden feels before the

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responsibilities of wifehood—the sweet dread of failure, which lends reluctance to the eager steps of love, and makes her pause before she enters the enlarged life. No woman ever makes a good wife or mother who does not stand trembling at the entrance of that path, fearing the very burden which has become her dearest joy. And so it is with all the best of men in every critical hour of their lives. The disciples would not have been fit for their great work, they would never have been able to do it, if they had not trembled when they saw the exceeding majesty of their Lord, and learned in that wonderful vision the greatness of the service to which they were called. They feared as they entered into the cloud.

Surely it is with some such mingled feelings as these that we should begin another year—not with gloomy thoughts, not with anticipations of evil, but with a certain holy fear overshadowing our very joy. Gladness is the key-note which we should strike this morning: any other note would be inappropriate. We are all wishing each other every imaginable good thing, the air rings with pleasant greetings, our hearts are full of kindly affection and warm sympathies. We are looking forward with that hopefulness which springs eternal in the human breast, which young and old almost equally share, which touches even the most melancholy and visits the very sorrowful when a new year begins, and which Christian people feel most of all. We ought to be

glad, for a new year means opening a new page in the book of God's kindly providence. It means new mercies, new seasons of grace, new growth in all wise knowledge and experience, new revelations of the love of God and of the blessedness of the life of faith. It means opportunities of enlarged usefulness and new possibilities of service. It means for the Church a call to higher things, and it means for the world, we trust, some brighter and happier things than it has ever seen before. Instinctively we speak the language of gratitude, of congratulation, of anticipation and hope. Still, like those disciples, we are entering into a cloud, and we know not what is coming to us out of the cloud. We know not what message we shall hear as we advance, what voices of change will summon us, what forms await us in the darkness. And when we think of all the possibilities of every kind which a year encloses in its round of days, of all the surprises which lie folded in its secret places, of the temptations which it is sure to bring, of the trials and sorrows which it may have in store, we cannot help standing on the threshold of it with a feeling such as that which the disciples had, with a sort of subdued fear giving a solemn quietness to our very joy. We cannot help kneeling humbly and childlike at God's feet, asking Him to hold up our goings all the way that our steps slip not, to strengthen us in the inner life so that our faith may not fail either in the darkness or the light, and to make our hearts trustful and happy with the sense of His love,

so that we may be able to bear cheerfully whatever may befall.

All of us commence the year with an earnest desire to make many things new. We are glad to have done with the old year, because there was so much of folly and evil in it, so much of weakness and inconsistency, so many things which caused humbling and shame and regret. We long to begin afresh. It is sweet to begin writing a new clean page in which there are no blots and smears and tears. It is a happy thing to make vows, and cherish hopes, and set before us again pure ideals. Oh yes, we trust, we most fervently trust and pray, that our lives all through this year will ring with a more honest, faithful, and kindly music, that our words and thoughts and actions may be more truthful and sincere, that our tempers may be under more perfect control, that our hearts may be free from all envy, malice, and unforgiveness, that our sympathies may have free play and not be hardened by our natural selfishness, and that in all purity of sentiment and all kindly brotherhood and charity we may be such men and women as are fit to bear the name of Christ: thus we hope, and the hope fills us with joy. It is as a cloud of glory, which we are invited to enter. But he who remembers how often he has entered upon a new year with the same thoughts, determined that all should be changed, resolved to have all the weak past left behind, and has soon slipped back into all the old ways and covered the new year with the same weary lines which

marked the old—he who remembers this, will fear for himself as he goes forward, and will make his new year's prayer as humble and self-distrustful as it is earnest and fervent. O God, we are as weak as a reed and fickle as the wind; we are afraid of ourselves. Be thou our strength, and turn our fears and trembling into the joy of successful endeavour and happy realisation.

And remember, my brethren, that every new year is a call to some higher service, to new and larger service, to Christian labours manifold and more than we have attempted before; for we cannot be satisfied with our former works. There is more to be done in the Church, in the town, and for the world. Every one who is faithful to the Master knows that more will be asked of him this year, and that he will need new powers and new grace if he is to do it well. He will begin, therefore, with fear and joy commingled—fear lest he should be found unfitted for the task, yet joyous that such work awaits him.

In this spirit let us commence, in this spirit go forward, fearful as we enter the cloud, yet sure that we shall find Jesus with us there and that all such prayerful fear is the avenue to noble things.

THE PRESENCE SHALL ENLIGHTEN THE WAY

(New Year)

“Shew me now Thy way. . . . And He said, My presence shall go with thee, and I will give thee rest. And he said unto Him, If thy presence go not with me, carry us not up hence.”—EXODUS xxxiii. 13-15.

HERE was a man who had a long journey before him, and a weight of responsibility which was more than human strength could bear. There was no clearly marked path before him. The future was hidden in thick clouds ; he was told to go forward and trust, that was all, and for a moment he hesitated. He had upon his hands some six hundred thousand overgrown children—fickle, impulsive, foolish, murmuring and rebellious children. He was charged to lead them through a terrible wilderness to some far-off land which neither he nor they had ever seen. He had suffered much already from their fits of petulance, freaks of madness, and repeated outbreaks of insolent disobedience, and just at this particular time they had almost driven him into despair by worshipping a golden calf and performing other antics equally

insane. To make anything good or great of such a people, or even to save them from destroying themselves, seemed a hopeless business. He trembled as he thought of the future, and then, as he had done many a time before, knelt at God's feet, confessed his fears and difficulties, prayed this prayer, and received the answer which we have recorded here. He asked, in fact, that some of the uncertainty might be removed, that God would be pleased to draw back that curtain which hid coming events, and give him a vision of them. What was the Almighty preparing for the people? What was He going to do with them, and what was His purpose concerning their leader? Shew me now, before it come to pass, thy way. He waited for the answer, and the answer came—not what he desired, but something wiser and better—My presence shall go with thee, and I will give thee rest. And then he cried out, as one whose very heart would break if that hope were taken away: Yes, give us that, or else it were better for us to die. If thy presence go not with us, carry us not up hence. Now, we have here:

1. An unenlightened prayer for light. A rash prayer, impatient, unwise, and of the kind which God never answers according to our pleasure. Shew me now thy way. He wanted to have the sealed book opened, unrolled, and set before him—that book in which God has written things to come. He wanted to read the chart of his own voyage, as the all-seeing one had traced it out, from the beginning to the end.

He wished still more perhaps to learn what things would happen to the nation under his charge. For the chief anxieties of a great soul like Moses' are not personal and egoistic. They spring from larger interests. They have to do with the lives and welfare of others. A generous leader is more solicitous about the safety of his army than of his own life. A large-hearted statesman is more concerned about the future of his country than about his own prospects. An earnest Christian is more troubled by the perils and calamities which threaten religion than by the clouds which are on his own path. Some of you have few fears for yourselves, but you are distressed on account of friends, you tremble a little for the nation, you are disturbed in mind about Christ's Church, you have many an hour of anxious foreboding about your children; you do not often say, O God shew me what the coming year will bring to me, but you do often say, in your hearts at least, would that I knew what will come to them. That was why Moses prayed for a sight of things which were to be. Yet every such prayer is as unwise as it is useless. God knows better than to let us know. To-day's burdens are sufficient without adding to them the burdens of coming days. Of course, we are always a little curious as we stand upon the threshold of a new year. We look wistfully down its dim, curtained corridors—we people them with creatures of imagination, with shining figures of hope, or vague, ugly fears. If we knew of some gifted seer or real fortune-teller

who could draw our horoscope infallibly, we might possibly consult him. It would be a great temptation. But if we preferred peace of mind and happy days and dreamless nights, we should avoid that man and let him sell his secrets to those who were foolish enough to pay for them. For he would not be a prophet of God. It is better from every point of view that we should not know. To know would fill some with demoralising pride and vain glory, and some with paralysing despair. It would stimulate none; it would dishearten many. We should lose our trust and forget our prayers. If we foresaw the gains and successes before we felt the thorns and nails which accompany them, we should be elated beyond measure. If we foresaw the trials, burdens, and failures before we got the strength to bear them, we should run away from life's battle, and lose our souls in cowardice and unbelief.

The Lord is too merciful to let us look ahead. It is in mercy that He overthrows our predictions and mocks our guesses. His dealings with us are for the most part surprises—every turn in the road brings us into something that was not anticipated. It is nearly always the unexpected that appears. We say at the opening of one year everything promises well. It is going to be a year of peace and progress; and lo, it turns to war and trouble. And we say of another year it is opening in clouds and darkness, it is going to be a black and dismal year; and lo, it changes soon to light and gladness, and goes out

with song. Behold we know not anything about to-morrow—we can only hope and trust; and it is better so. The uncertainties of life keep us sober, watchful, reverently humble, and prayerful. They help to make us patient, brave, dutiful, and religious. It would not help us to know the way that God is going to take with us. It is enough to know the way that He would have us go, step by step. Light sufficient for that is the only light we need and the only light that would not be dazzling, bewildering, and blinding. Shew us our duty and keep the rest in thine own hands until the time comes for us to know it. I do not ask to see the distant scene—one step enough for me. Lead thou me on.—That is the prayer of faith, and far wiser than the cry of Moses: Shew me now thy way.

2. The rash and inconsiderate prayer is answered in God's larger wisdom. Shew me what is coming, said Moses. And the voice replies, Only this much will I shew thee. My presence shall go with you, and I will give thee rest. God strips the request of all that is presumptuous and unwise, and answers what remains. He denies the wish that would work mischief, and grants the sure blessing. It is a mercy that most of our prayers are dealt with in this manner. They need to be passed through God's crucible, tested, analysed, divided, and purified, for the dross and gold in them are strangely mixed. Faith and foolishness go hand in hand in most of our approaches to God. We cry for impossible things

and hurtful things and dubious things. We ask for smooth things when we need rough things, and wine and honey when medicine would be far better. We should miss most of the best and highest things of life if God were to say yes to all our requests, and we should imbibe a great deal of poison in the course of life if He allowed us to drink every cup that we asked for. We have as much reason to be thankful for the prayers that have not been answered as for those to which the desired answer has come. He takes the kernel of our prayers and flings away the husk and shell. He gives us less than we ask—yet gives us exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think.

Very few of the hopes, wishes, and prayers with which we have commenced the year will be realised exactly in just the shape which they take in our minds now. Very few, perhaps none! Some of our purposes will be quite broken off, some will be deferred, some will be fulfilled, but in forms so changed that we hardly know them, and some will give place to other and far better purposes; yet in everything that happens there will be a direct answer to prayer for those who have prayed continuously. God is a deceiver and yet true: He does not grant our requests, and yet He does grant them, reading a deeper meaning in them than we can see, and fulfilling them not in our way but His own. Shew me now thy way! No! Such a revelation would be fatal at present. Do you think that Moses

would have thanked God for that? If he could have foreseen those forty years of wandering, of disappointment and cross-bearing, would it have made him a stronger, braver man? Not likely! Far better that he should know only this: My presence shall go with thee, and I will give thee rest. He went forward confidently, in reliance on that promise. Each difficulty was surmounted as it came, each perplexity was unravelled as it appeared, each day of trial brought with it new strength. The Presence never failed, the promise was never broken, there was rest for him under all the burdens and through all the conflicts. God answered the prayer in the way that was merciful and wise. And we, my brethren, can have no better promise than this. With the word in our ears, there is no room for anxious forebodings in our hearts. If the Presence go with us, all will be well. If we know that God is near, fears and alarms will be far off. Those who carry Him into the storms of life carry rest. Where He is, though wars are on every side, there is one place of peace. In the deepest darkness there is light for those who discern His movements and hear His voice. In the desert there will be water springs, and in all barren and rugged places the green pastures of His love. Thou wilt keep him in perfect peace whose mind is stayed on thee. Ask not of the days to come, fret not to know what the year will bring forth for the nation or thyself. Be sure of this only: That if thou trust and go thy way leaning upon Him, it will shew

thee new treasures of divine love, new proofs of His changeless protection, new accessions of divine strength. Only remember that where thou goest He will be, and where thou dwellest He will dwell, and in the shadow of the Almighty shall be thy perpetual habitation. For ourselves and our children, for the nation, the Church, and the world, this promise is given to every believing heart: My presence shall go with you, and I will give thee rest.

3. Now see how faith at once recognises that this is the surest and best blessing, and eagerly asks that it may be given. Yes, cries Moses at the finish, that is what I need, just that and not the other thing—thy presence. If thy presence go not with me, carry us not up hence. There had been something said in a previous vision about an angel who should accompany and guide their journey, and now Moses prays: No angel, but just thyself, only that would suffice. It needed nothing less than direct, Almighty, and constant guidance, to carry him and his people to the desired end. Without God they were but straw driven and tossed with winds of chance, helpless things drifting about a whirlpool. Lord, if thy presence go not with us, carry us not up hence.

This will be the confession of every religious man and woman at the beginning of the year. We dare not trust ourselves; we cannot depend upon any of life's uncertainties. If the past has taught us anything it is this: That we were weak when we thought ourselves strong, often most foolish when we deemed

ourselves specially wise, most erring where we claimed infallibility, most disappointed where our calculations were most confident, and that we only acted wisely and well when we took hold of God's hand and in trustful prayer let Him lead us. And all that, brings us to God in the morning of the year with a cry that from the first to the last of its days He will hold up our goings and over-shadow our steps with His Almighty presence. No one who realises the solemnities of life, who feels large duties pressing upon him—none, in fact, but the frivolous and light-hearted, can escape the awful sense of responsibility and the almost overwhelming feeling of insufficiency which made Moses fling out this concluding prayer: If thy presence go not with us? That is true whatever relationship we fill. A minister, a Sunday school teacher, a Christian worker, a Church office-bearer, would rather lay down his work and speak no more to his fellowmen than undertake another year's work without God to inspire and sustain him. Every religious father and mother, who are responsible for the growth and moral shaping of their children, would become desperate if they did not believe that a higher mind and wisdom than their own will share with them the burden—watching when they sleep and remembering when they forget. Every man who is beginning another year of business or of public service will feel deeply that it will be impossible to preserve integrity and keep a conscience void of offence unless he is restrained and prevented by the

power unseen and the mighty Spirit who works within.

And all of us who know by experience what strange things every year brings, what novel temptations meet every one; how easy it is to make shipwreck of faith and other good things, how men are corrupted by success and embittered and soured by failure—I say all of us who think of these things, will wish to kneel with Paul, confessing who is sufficient for these things, or with Moses clinging fast to God and saying, If thy presence go not with us. We cannot, we dare not look forward with any confidence, unless we have that assurance first of all; without that we are but creatures of blind fate, playthings of chance, waifs upon a hurrying stream, driftwood upon a heaving sea.

But life shakes off all its fears, and looks with calm, brave face into the future, where faith has bound it to an everlasting love, and where through all changes it hears the same voice repeating: Fear not, for I am with thee. I will never leave thee nor forsake, and where I am there shall also my servant be.

PALM SUNDAY AND ITS LESSONS

■ And the multitudes that went before, and that followed after, cried, saying Hosanna to the Son of David.”—MATT. xxi. 9.

THIS is called Palm Sunday, because on this day all those years ago our Saviour made his triumphal entrance into the city of Jerusalem, and the city was greatly moved to welcome Him. Great crowds of people lined the path along which He rode, waving palm branches, as was the custom in those days when a king came to visit his people or when some great soldier returned victorious from the wars—palm branches waving in the air, palm branches spread for Him to ride upon, shouts of vociferous greeting from thousands of rejoicing lips, and loud Hosannas from the very children. It was a grand triumphal procession, and Christ perhaps reached the zenith of His popularity that day. He suffered it all. He did not attempt to check them. He seemed to be really glad indeed that children's voices were lifting up to Him a song of praise, and He looked upon them with the kindly smile which He always had for young and infant faces. But He was not deceived by this boisterous welcome. He saw the shadow of

the cross among the palm branches. He heard through the Hosannas another cry, not far distant—Crucify Him. He knew that this triumphal procession was but a funeral march, and that He had been virtually anointed for the burial. In those Eastern lands the fair blue sky smiles with the serenity of heaven almost up to the moment when it bursts in thunder clouds and quivering lightning; and the people are like their skies. He knew that the clouds were gathering, that the air was charged with sulphurous elements, that Jerusalem was like a volcano on the verge of eruption, and that the fury and hatred which had been gathering and mounting to fierce heat for three years was about to be poured on His devoted head. The hour was at hand towards which He had been hastening—the hour of darkness and forsakenness—when there would be no eyes to pity, when the crowd would forget His miracles and the disciples His teachings, and even those who leaned on His breast would see no beauty in His face. He foresaw it all. But no one else could have imagined it or believed it possible, it was a change so sudden, so complete. On Sunday palm branches and Hosannas, on Friday the mocking of the multitude and a cross. On Sunday the proudest moment of His life, as the disciples thought; six days later the deepest humiliation, the awful loneliness, and, to superficial eyes, the utter ruin of His cause.

Palm Sunday ought to have something to say to us, if we can hear its voice and learn its lessons.

Some of those lessons I do not wish to dwell upon they would be depressing. They would say to us: Put not your trust in man or in the sons of men. Do not depend upon their favour or the constancy of their love; for they are fickle, and the lightest wind will turn them as easily as it does a straw. There are few sadder pictures of humanity than that which is shown us on the surface of this story. A crowd of people worshipping Christ as their king, blessing Him in the name of the Lord, and changing round so quickly that before the week was over they were shouting with one voice, Give us Barabbas and let Him be crucified. If we followed out that thought, and that alone, we should become cynics, and might, like the cynic, learn to despair of ourselves and our fellow-men. But here we are stopped by Christ Himself. He knew that all these people would presently turn round and fling gibes and scorn at Him instead of Hallelujahs. He foresaw the whole of Jerusalem crying out for His death. He foresaw the cross, the midnight darkness, the winepress red with blood which He must tread alone, and the exulting jeers of those who, when they rolled the stone against the sepulchre, boasted that they had quenched His light for ever. And yet on this very day He spoke one of the most triumphant words of hope that ever fell from His lips. They will forsake Me now, but they will come to Me afterwards. He was as one looking through humiliation gloom, and despair, to a scene beyond, where a whole

world bowed adoring at His feet, looking through a dismal battlefield where all His forces lay stricken, to a morning of victory when all armies would be His, and those who had rejected Him would be bound with love's fetters to His feet. Yes! it was on that very day—Palm Sunday—that He spoke those words of infinite assurance: I, if I be lifted up from this earth, will draw all men unto me. In that spirit and in that light should we read the lessons of to-day. Human nature is weak, fickle, and untrustworthy, but divine grace and the power of Jesus will yet conquer, subdue, and renew it into love and obedience.

1. One thing we learn here is that the sympathies of the multitude are right. This great mass of people, untaught, ignorant, simple-minded, with no one to guide them, instinctively gave their honour and adoration to Christ. They had heard of His kindly works, His sympathy with all who were in sorrow, His uniform goodness and purity, and their hearts went out to Him. Their instincts, as we may call them, were right. But their opinions and judgments were weak and easily swayed. And when a few crafty priests and glib-tongued Pharisees had been in and out among them saying this and that false thing of Christ, slandering and reviling Him, and declaring that He sought not the people's good, but to subvert their customs and destroy the nation, that was quite enough to change the sentiments and voices of all who had greeted Him with Hosannas. You can always trust the people, however ignorant,

may, however degraded they are, to side with what they think right and just and brave and generous. The very mob has an instinctive admiration and reverence for goodness, purity, generosity, courage, and self-denial, and will always applaud noble sentiments and noble deeds. But also they are easily swayed to the wrong side when those who lead them cleverly represent it as the right side. You may depend upon their instincts, but you cannot depend either upon their intelligent judgment or their stability if their passions are excited by voices which play upon their ignorance for a selfish purpose. You can get any sort of music from a crowd, if you know how to play skilfully enough. Heavenly music almost, or sounds more like those of hell. Everything depends upon those to whom they lend their ears—their guides and leaders. God send us always good and true leaders—His own elect ones—and may we ever be delivered from leaders with lying lips and corrupt hearts, like those rulers of Jerusalem who changed the Hosannas of the people into cries of fury! But what we learn first from this Palm Sunday scene is, that there is something in the conscience and heart of the multitude which makes goodness attractive. And that thought should help all who work among them for Christ.

2. The ideals of the multitude are often coarse and material, and sorely need to be purified and raised. On that Palm Sunday they were chanting praises, not to the real Christ as He was, but to the imaginary

Christ which they thought He ought to be. When they spread those palm branches for Him to tread upon, they had no idea that He had come to save them from their sins and uncleanness, and to purify their hearts. They thought he was the Messiah whose purpose was to enrich them and the nation with wealth and bodily comfort, to relieve them of Rome's bondage and heavy taxation, and bring in a time of plenty and prosperity for the very poorest. That was what the shoutings and songs of Palm Sunday meant. And that sort of glorying and huzzaing could not last. It was soon to pass away, like so much empty breath, simply because it came out of a falsehood. They found out very soon, that that coarse material work was not Christ's purpose at all, and then they turned against Him. There is no real worship of Christ save that which is founded on a true understanding of His character and mission. He comes not to change things without, but to make the world slowly new by a change of the heart within. There was a story a little while ago which went the round of the papers and made some little sensation. It was in the course of a labour dispute. A speaker was addressing a crowd of strikers, and he spoke to them about Jesus, the man of Nazareth, how the man of Nazareth was always on the side of the poor and against the rich, how He sympathised with all hard labourers and denounced the luxurious capitalists; and the speaker intimated that if Jesus were here now, He would probably take the post of

leader in that strike, and fight to the bitter end against the masters and for higher wages. When he said that, the whole crowd of men took off their caps and waved them in the air, and gave three cheers for the man of Nazareth. Was not that something like the Palm Sunday Hosannas?—they were cheers given on false pretences. What if that speaker had told the men the simple fact that this Jesus did not meddle with wages or with distribution of goods, but preached justice and mercy and human love to all classes, and rebuked sin and selfishness of every kind, whether in rich people or poor people, that He set His face not only against greed and extortion and covetousness, but against drunkenness, and laziness, and uncleanness, and foulness of speech, and sensuality, and evil thoughts of every kind, and that His great work was to make pure hearts and clean, sweet, God-fearing lives. Would they have given three cheers for the man of Nazareth then. Yet this is what we have to teach men about Jesus, whether they like Him for it or not. We have to preach Him as essentially, and above all things, the Saviour from sin. To win praises for Him on any other ground is a lie, and all such praises will soon pass away, as the Hosannas of Palm Sunday did. He comes not to gratify our carnal cravings, but to raise our ideals and fill us with a higher food. And now, two brief words to finish, first, to all Christian workers :

3. Palm Sunday bids you go steadily on. You are

not to be elated by temporary triumphs, or cast down by the proved fickleness of those among whom you labour. There will always be sunshine and shadow in your course. You will hear praises one day, and maybe only blame, censure, and slander the next. If you are engaged in any sort of public work you will have the palm branches waved around you at one season, and ere long there will be no palm branches, but something not unlike the shadow of a cross. In fact, in all good, self-forgetting, and saving work, there will be these fluctuations. And you need to steady your heart's purpose by sitting at the feet of Christ. Think how calmly He took the Hosannas, and how bravely He endured those other cries. And learn from His unfailing hopefulness how to labour and to wait.

4. And the other word is to all who are worshipping here to-night: Take care that your Hosannas are not put aside and forgotten in the coming week-days. You have all been singing praises to the King to-night, you have spread the offerings of your adoration at His feet. It is easy to do that when all the crowd or all the congregation about you are doing it. But by and by you will go out among men that love Him not—perhaps men who almost hate Him and speak evil of Him as those priests and rulers did—or among those at least who have no sympathy whatever with His cause. You will be tempted in many ways to prove Him, to forget Him, to be unfaithful to Him, to

deny Him. It is possible even to crucify Him again, for the wrong-doing of His professed servants is almost as wounding and painful to Him as a crucifixion. Let not your Hallelujahs to-day be followed by days in which one might easily believe that you did not care for Him at all. You have exalted Him over your lives and in your hearts on this Palm Sunday; exalt Him all the weeks in your lives, and may God so help in all things that we shall be able to do it.

PALM SUNDAY THOUGHTS

“On the next day much people that were come to the feast, when they heard that Jesus was coming to Jerusalem, took branches of palm trees, and went forth to meet Him, and cried, Hosanna: Blessed is the King of Israel that cometh in the name of the Lord.”—JOHN xii. 12-13.

THAT was the first day of the passover week, as this is the first day of passion week, and we call it Palm Sunday, because of the incident which is recorded here and by all the evangelists. On that day Jesus made His last entrance into the city of Jerusalem. And it was a triumphal entrance which seemed strangely out of character with the events that speedily followed. The people were wild to welcome Him. They thronged out to the road on which He was coming, carrying palm branches, as was the custom when a King came to visit his people, or when some great soldier returned victorious from the wars. Palm branches were waved in the air and spread on the ground for Him to ride upon. Shouts of greeting, bravos, and hurrahs, rose from thousands of rejoicing lips, and sweet Hosannas were sung by the very children. It was like a royal reception. It was the greatest ovation that Jesus ever had. It

seemed as if on that day He had reached the very zenith of His popularity. And He accepted it as His right. He made no attempt to check the demonstration. He was really glad indeed to hear the children's praises, and He looked on them with the kindly smile which He always had for young and innocent faces. But He was not elated, still less was He deceived by this boisterous and enthusiastic welcome. He saw the shadow of the cross through those palm branches. He heard another cry rising behind those Hosannas, a fierce cry of Crucify Him. He knew that this triumphal procession was the beginning of a funeral march, and that He had been virtually anointed for His burial. In those Eastern lands storms come suddenly, the fair blue sky smiles with the serenity of heaven almost up to the moment when it breaks in thunderous wrath and quivering lightning. And the people are like their skies. They had Hallelujahs for Him to-day and praises. They would have anathemas and nails, and a cross, not many days hence. Palm Sunday, with its glorious welcome, and black Friday with its awful tragedy. There were only four clear days between. The contrast was so complete, and so swiftly wrought, that it seems even now incredible and inexplicable. How could it be? So great a revulsion of feeling in one week. Sunday ready to crown Him King. Friday shouting—Away with Him and give us Barabbas. Was it mere fickleness and frivolity? It would make us almost despair of humanity if that were all; there are some other things

to be taken into account. First, it is St John alone who tells us that it was not the city of Jerusalem which gave Him that welcome, and it was not the people of Jerusalem. It was the crowd of visitors, chiefly from Galilee, who streamed out to do Him that honour—people who had come up to the feast from the Northern towns and villages, in which He had done most of His mighty works. Galilee always made more of Him than Jerusalem. Jerusalem always received Him coldly, partly because He was the prophet of Galilee, the Nazarene, and still more because Jerusalem was priest-hardened, priest-enslaved, priest-blinded, and dead in trespasses and sins beyond all other spots in the Holy Land. Jerusalem gave Him no welcome that day. It was the strangers who waved the palm branches. Jerusalem found voice in that later and fiercer tumult by which He was hounded to His death. We may well believe that some of the Galileans in the crowd on that crucifixion day had not turned round so completely as the surface reading of the story would show. They had not quite forgotten the reverence they paid Him five days ago, and changed in that short time into brute beasts thirsting for His blood. Some of them must have looked on the awful tragedy with pity, and may be with horror. But a few sane men are lost in a maddened crowd; they are overawed into silence. You say a crowd is of one mind when you hear its deafening shouts; yet in that crowd there are sure to be some who have no part in

the madness around them, but whose voices are drowned in the louder hubbub, or silent through fear. Have you not sometimes been overawed in this manner? Have you not heard the good reviled, the cause which you love derided, the religion which you believe in ridiculed, and yet have made no protest, because it was either useless there, or because fear kept you dumb? Your sympathies were right, but you were powerless to enforce them, or had not courage to utter them. There must have been a few such men in that maddened multitude. They had not all changed so swiftly and completely as would appear.

And yet most of them had; and you can understand it if you read the story closely. Many things happened in those few days which were of a kind to turn the sentiments and work upon the passions of an ignorant crowd. Those few days were the most eventful days of the Saviour's life. They were crowded with incidents which were calculated to arouse the prejudices and inflame the fury of Jerusalem. He had come up to that city to die. He foresaw His cruel baptism. He made no effort to avoid it, because it could only be avoided by dishonesty and cowardly silence. He had a witness to bear against Jerusalem, its iniquity and falseness, its covetousness and pride, its hollow Pharisaism, its crafty priests, its unjust rulers, its dead and corrupt religion. That witness must be borne, and it would mean the kindling of a wrath that would be fatal to Him. From the day of His entrance He de-

clared war against all these hated things, and turned one party after another furiously against Him. It was on Palm Sunday that He drove out the traders from the temple and made the whole tribe of them His enemies. Then followed those scathing parables, in which the rulers and the priests were denounced as robbers of God's vineyard, and threatened with a wrath to come. Then He grievously offended all the zealous patriots by advising the people to pay tribute unto Cæsar. And finally, He uttered that string of withering woes against the Scribes, Pharisees, and hypocrites, which we cannot read to-day without a shudder. It was all true, it was all needed. It was the divine righteousness in Him, and the intense hatred of sin, that compelled Him to speak. But He knew that He was signing His death sentence; for the men who cowered and writhed under these lashes would never forgive and never rest until they had accomplished their purpose on Him.

Think of all that, and you can understand what influences were at work turning the hearts of the very people who had sung Hosannas to Him. Traders, rulers, politicians, Scribes, rich men, lawyers, priests, and Pharisees—all the men of light and leading, as they would be called—going about everywhere whispering, slandering, accusing, defaming, lying, undermining, with all the craft of malice and the astuteness of perverted intellect and knowledge. Those five days of busy devilry would be enough

to do all the mischief. For the lying tongue was as powerful then as it is to-day, and all the more powerful in this case, because sharpened with cleverness and weighted with religious authority. And so they stirred up the multitude against Him. And there was one thing which perhaps gave the finishing and most powerful impulse to the agitation: there was His betrayal by one of His own disciples. The priests and rulers were clever enough to bargain for that. They would have paid for it, not thirty pieces of silver, but ten times as much. If they could only introduce treachery into His own company, if they could persuade His disciples to denounce and hand Him over, or even to desert and abandon His cause, it would have an effect upon all the waverers, it would help to make the people of one mind in condemning Him. And it answered exactly to their calculations. The treachery in their midst was like a paralytic stroke on all the disciples. It filled them with suspicion of each other. No one of them could trust his fellow. It suggested even distrust of their Master. It spread panic through them, and they all deserted Him. And the multitude saw it and said: He must be a deceiver when His best friends lift up their voices against Him, when those who have followed Him for years and loved most, scatter like sheep and leave Him to His fate.

And so it came about that the Hallelujahs of Palm Sunday became the execrations of the next

Friday. And surely it is worth thinking of. It is good, though sad, to tell the whole story again, how the Lord of love came to be hated and the Prince of life was made to drink death's bitterest draught. It should help us all to bear our sorrows and disappointments, to bear hours of misjudgment and perhaps of slander, if we remember how He was maligned and stabbed in the dark and pursued with lies and accused of crimes and plotted against. Oh, the horror of it all! We may not know, we cannot tell, how much He had to bear. Our heaviest cross grows light beneath the shadow, Lord, of thine. And every one who reads this story gets new strength to bear, and learns a little of the Master's patience. Palm Sunday teaches us many lessons.

It bids you go steadily on in your Christian course and with your Christian work. You are not to be too much elated by temporary triumphs and successes. Do not get proud in the sunshine, for the darker days will follow. And do not be cast down by the fickleness of those among whom you labour. It was on that very Sunday, when He foresaw immediately before Him the coming desolation and forsakenness—on that very Palm Sunday He spoke His most magnificent word of hope and final victory: I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto Me. The passing popularity did not deceive Him; the crushing defeat and humiliation did not depress Him. He marched steadily on

to the final and glorious result. So be it with you. There will always be sunshine and shadow in your path; you will hear praises to-day and may be only censure and reproach to-morrow. Every good man at times has the palm branches brought to him, and every good man knows that behind the palm branches there is the shadow of the cross. Let him be humble enough to take the first meekly, and brave enough to meet the other in the spirit of the Master, and let him learn that through all changes and fluctuations in the world and men about him the purpose of God stands fast.

And another word which Palm Sunday speaks to all of us is a word of solemn watchfulness and warning. Take care that your Hosannas are not put aside and forgotten in the coming week-days. You have all been singing praises to King Jesus to-night, you have been spreading offerings of adoration at His feet. It is easy to do that when the whole crowd or the whole congregation around you are doing it. But to-morrow you will go out among men that love Him not, men who have no sympathy with His cause, and no respect for His religion, whatever they may think of Him. You will be tempted in many ways to ignore Him and forget Him, to be unfaithful to Him and deny Him. It is possible even to crucify Him again, for the wrong-doing of His professed servants wounds Him like a crucifixion. Watch yourselves and pray. Let not your Hallelujahs to-day be followed by days in which we might easily believe

that you did not care for Him at all. You have exalted Him in your lives and in your hearts on this Palm Sunday: exalt Him all the week in your lives. And may the grace of God help us all to that end.

THE DIVINE INSPIRATION AND NECESSITY OF A SUFFERING CHRIST

(Passion Week)

“For it became Him, for whom are all things, and by whom are all things, in bringing many sons unto glory, to make the captain of their salvation perfect through suffering.”—
HEB. ii. 10.

THIS day is the beginning of what we call Passion Week, and to-day and on the days following, the thoughts of Christians in every part of the world will be drawn to the suffering Saviour and to the scenes in which He wrought our redemption. Not at this season alone do we remember His cross and humiliation. They are never entirely absent from the faith and worship of those who meet in His name. Yet at this time we can hardly fail to see the form of the Crucified One with peculiar vividness, and have brought home to us the great part which pain and tears and death played in the incarnation mystery and in the saving of men. There are a few, perhaps, who may wish that the preacher would dwell on some brighter aspects of Christian truth.

They would rather think of Jesus in His happiest hours than of Jesus sweating blood-drops in the Garden, and rather think of life's gay and sunny scenes than of its shades and mystery and pain. But they are the light and careless hearts, who know little either of Jesus or of human life. Those of us who honestly wish to see Jesus, those of us who wish to get a true understanding of God, and those of us who wish to read the deeper meaning of human life, will take our stand before the cross and the Man of Sorrows. For though Calvary is a place of mourning, it is also a place of illumination, and in its deepest darkness we see the light which lighteneth all things.

Some such thought as this suggested our text. The writer was addressing himself to Hebrew Christians, who had not yet quite reconciled themselves to a suffering Christ. They still shared in that Jewish conception of the Messiah which made the cross an offence. Why should the anointed one, the chosen messenger of God, be passed through that wine-press of shame and agony instead of marching on in joyous triumph and planting His feet on the necks of His enemies? Why all that weakness and yielding and intolerable suffering, if He was indeed the beloved Son in whom the Father was well pleased? How could that awful and heartbreaking Calvary scene be the sign and seal of God's approval? These questions and questions like them, which are sometimes asked to-day, were answered in the words which I have read to you: "It became

Him, for whom are all things, and to whom are all things, in bringing many sons unto glory, to make the captain of their salvation perfect through suffering." The writer here expounds to us the divine philosophy of suffering, and declares that only by a suffering Saviour could God's thought and purpose in redemption be expressed and fulfilled. It became Him. It was right and reasonable and necessary that He should take the way of suffering to reach His glorious end, for :

1. The revelation of His fatherhood required it. Humanity was His own child. Humanity was a child of many sorrows, familiar with tears, and the tears were, in part at least, of His own ordaining. Sin had enormously increased the sorrows, but apart from sin there were the pangs and travail of creation, there was everywhere pain and struggle and bereavement and the bleeding and breaking heart. How could He join Himself to humanity without sharing human tears? If He really loved and pitied His sad and guilty world, how could He send His saving message to us otherwise than through the life of a suffering one? How could He prove to men His fatherhood except by bearing their infirmities? How could He become incarnate save as a Man of Sorrows? Let us suppose that some thoughtful heathen of the ancient world had been told that a time was coming when heaven's love would be revealed to men beyond all doubt and question, when men with glad and fearless trust would call Him Father, and look upon their

very griefs and burdens as proof of His kindly discipline. This thoughtful heathen would surely have answered: There is but one way in which that can be done. Men will never believe it unless He come Himself to prove it either by healing their pains or by taking His part in them. They will not believe in His pity until they have seen His tears. He will have to act as a Father would, sharing their burdens and weariness and drinking their bitter cup, or they will never believe that He is in very truth a Father. That is what our wise heathen would have said. That is indeed substantially what the wise Greek Plato did say. And that is almost exactly what we should say ourselves. God could only prove His fatherly love in this one way. We measure love by its willingness to suffer with and for the beloved. Tell me how much a man is willing to bear and give up for friend, brother, or wife, how much pain a mother will endure for her child, and I know the depth and reality of the affection. And nothing else can make it sure. Though a hundred witnesses declared it, I should not believe in the love of one who held aloof from my conflicts, never stooped to help me with my burdens, never held his lips near my cup of tears. There is no proof of love which the human heart can understand except this. And God's love could not prove itself to us save in some such way.

Imagine Jesus coming to such a place as the pool of Bethesda, and, when the throng of misery-stricken wretches tried to touch Him, standing apart from

them with unmoved face, and making no answer to their cries except to tell them that it was good for them to suffer, and part of God's ordering. Imagine Him with health on His face and no throb of pain in His body assuring them that though He was not disposed to help them, still He loved and pitied them. What a mockery it would have been ! But if Christ had said to them : Though I may not heal you all and cannot, yet I will come among you and touch you, even though I catch the infection, and for your sakes will suffer more than you are suffering ; then not one person in all that crowd would have been in doubt about His love. And that is indeed what God in Christ has done, that is one deep meaning of the incarnation and the cross. For the world is on the whole not unlike the pool of Bethesda. It is on the whole sad, sick, and weary. Some of you do not know how weary it is. You are young, joyous, and hopeful, and have not come in contact with the deeper, larger world of pain. You have lived for the most part in the sunlight and away from the shadows. Yet there is no question that to the great mass of humanity life is hard and full of unrest, panting, groaning, and aching with manifold pains. To the all-seeing eyes of God, it is and always has been a world of sorrows. And we do not understand why He should have made it so, or allows it to remain so. We often say : If it be not a necessity, why does He not remove it ? And if it be somehow necessary, if the human race can only be developed and brought forward by

all this pain, then surely His love would say: Your pain is mine, and I will bear it with you. And that is just what He has chosen to do. For the cross is not suffering inflicted by God upon another, not divine wrath poured out upon an innocent victim. That idea of Calvary will not bear a moment's thought. The suffering Son is substantially the suffering Father. It is God in Christ who bears the pain. It is God taking upon His own heart the sicknesses and sorrows. It became Him by whom are all things to make His love known through this way of sacrifice and pain.

2. It became Him who brings many sons unto glory through pain that He should in His dearly beloved Son lead the way to glory through suffering. We are in a world in which suffering is the very condition of progress. Without painful endurance there is no advance; without hard struggle and conflict there is no moral or intellectual victory; without bearing of shame there is never any glory won, there is something of the cross along the whole upward way which humanity takes, there is a calvary at the foot of every higher stage. Men are developed by their hardships and strengthened by their conflicts. All their virtues are gained in the wrestle against enormous difficulties and in the fight with evils and sins. Every new truth which man discovers, every clearer height which he surmounts, every victory which he wins over ignorance, animalism, and his own lower self, is the result of anxious strife and tears and

even blood-drops. Energies are perfected by suffering, patience is learned by suffering and self-mastery, the affections are deepened and purified, and love attains its highest form, through suffering. It seems as if nothing good and nothing great and nothing godlike could be done or gained without it, and surely this is no accidental arrangement or blind law of nature. He that wrought us for this self-same thing is God. He by whom are all things, and for whom are all things, has purposed to bring many sons unto glory by this very process. He has ordered the world in such a way that without pain there shall be no growth, without fear no enlargement, without travail no new birth, without death no larger life, without humiliation no glory. It is all fashioned on this principle. First the cross and then the crown, first the sowing in tears and then the harvest of joy. There must have been some wise and all-powerful necessity for it. It would not have been so good in the end with any other way. Yes! but then comes the inference which the writer draws: If the sons of God could only be brought into glory through suffering, was it not reasonable that God Himself should stoop to suffer? If the way was right and wise and inevitable, would He not go first and submit to it Himself? It was as if He said: My children, I have made the cross the way to glory; it is the way which my perfect love designs for you, and to prove *that* love, I myself, in my best beloved, will lead the way. It became Him who has set up crosses for His children

everywhere on the upward path to bear the hardest cross Himself.

3. It became Him who made the way of suffering the way of perfection for all men that He should make the captain of men, the ideal Man, the Divine Man, perfect by the same sorrow and cross-bearing. We are startled by the bold words which the writer uses here, and which he repeats in other places—that Jesus himself learned obedience, learned patience, learned sympathy, and reached highest manhood, by suffering; this writer asserts throughout that the Son of God was without sin, holy, harmless, and undefiled. Yet that even He could not attain perfection without suffering. And surely we can understand in a measure that great truth. Jesus could not have become highest man unless He had known and felt the depth and bitterness of human pains. Our ideal man, the one to whom we look as our prince and leader, as the embodiment of all that we aspire to and adore—that man must be, above all things, strong to suffer and made strong through suffering. It was, in fact, the sufferings which made the man Christ Jesus as we know and love Him. Without them He would have been no more to us than a piece of delicate and exquisite artistry. His patience came of his suffering; His forgiveness grew out of that, His calm serenity, His abounding hopefulness, His wonderful self-mastery, and, more than all, His sympathy. Without the suffering He could not have known and sympathised with the sorrows of men. He could not

have been the fountain of pity if He had not trod the way of tears. He could not have helped men to bear their crosses if He had not borne His own. He could not have been in any sort the Priest, the King, the Saviour whom we need, unless He had been touched with the feeling of all our infirmities and had trodden the loneliest wine-press of all. Through suffering He reached perfect manhood, that from Him we might learn to bear and reach upward and understand even now in a measure the mystery of redeeming pain. For it is an awful hopeless mystery until we see God in Christ, until we grasp the thought that God is and has been in all the pain, and that even His very Son, the holy One, needed pain to make Him perfect. There we see the diviner meaning, which runs through all the world's darker things, and the lines of golden light which shine through our own sorrows; and we see then that the cross is in the very heart of God, and like the centre and soul of all things.

It became Him for whom are all things, and by whom are all things, in bringing many sons unto glory, to make the captain of their salvation perfect through sufferings.

THE SACRIFICE OF JESUS

(*Good Friday*).

“For He hath made Him to be sin for us, who knew no sin ; that we might be made the righteousness of God in Him.”
—2 COR. v. 21.

THERE are some religious questions which a minister shrinks from, not because he wishes to hide his views or is afraid of stating them, but because he is modestly afraid of the questions, and finds them too large to grapple with. There is perhaps no text in the Bible which a raw preacher is not willing to undertake ; but I know a great many which I, after forty years experience, regard with trembling hesitancy, and hardly dare venture to expound. When I commenced my religious studies, I thought I knew exactly what these words of Paul meant. I am not so sure about them now, and I think that this is not because I have grown less wise, but because I have become more humble. My very reverence for Jesus Christ makes me reluctant to profess that I understand all about Him, and my belief that there is an *infinite* meaning in His sacrificial death, saves me from the presumption of thinking that my poor mind has grasped it to per-

fection. Men who have never made these things a study, who have merely accepted some popular and superficial interpretation of them, are indignant with those who find this superficial interpretation insufficient, and condemn as unbelief what is, in fact, deeper reverence and lowlier humility. People will tell you in their thoughtless, cruel way, that some Christian teacher does not believe in the atonement, when in truth he believes in it more profoundly than they. He has studied it more years than they have hours, and has found in it unspeakably more of truth and meaning than has entered into their hearts to conceive. It is because he feels it so great and deep and manifold in its bearings that he cannot speak of it in glib, confident sentences, as if it had no mystery for him. About the fact itself, I do not know how any devout Christian can be in doubt; that Christ died for the sins of men is the central truth of the gospel; but one may be sure of the fact without being able to interpret it. The Church of the first three centuries had no theory of atonement. They believed that Christ suffered, the just for the unjust, to bring us to God, but they asked no questions. The fact was sufficient, yet these three hundred years were the golden age of the Church, when martyrs were counted by thousands and Christian graces flourished in very luxuriance of beauty. The men who were so mightily swayed and subdued by the suffering Saviour could not have told you why the Saviour suffered. It was the cross itself that filled them with adoring

gratitude, and not any theological interpretation of it, and so it may be to-day. The Church has given many answers to the question—Why did Christ die? It has changed its views from age to age. Its theories have been transitory, because they have never been wholly true. But the Church has always clung to the central truth that He made Himself a sacrifice for sin, and has found in that both inspiration and healing. If, then, I venture to utter some crude and imperfect thoughts on this subject, it is not because I deem it needful to explain and understand it, but simply with the view of helping you to think reverently about a great mystery.

Now as to the general fact that the spotless Son of God should suffer for the guilt of this world, I do not suppose that any thoughtful man has ever deemed that either unlikely or extraordinary. A man must be absolutely blind who does not see that the world is framed on the principle of vicarious suffering. The innocent are always bearing the burdens of the guilty, the good are always paying the penalty of sinners. The pangs of martyrs and the heartbreak of saints are always endured for the coming good of humanity, and not as the punishment of their own sins. It is by the agonies of the noblest men, the cross-bearing of the purest women, the sufferings of those who least deserve to suffer, that the world is slowly purged from sin and redeemed. The path of progress is

marked all the way by crosses : " Without shedding of blood there is no remission of sin," and this being God's order, it was only reasonable that the appointed Saviour of the world should be its foremost sufferer, that He who came to take away its sin should bear its heaviest cross, and that He who knew no sin should be made sin for us, that we might be made the righteousness of God in Him.

But this great truth has sometimes been stated in language which makes reasonable men revolt from it. Often has the vicarious sacrifice of Christ been simply vulgarised by the explanations which have been given of it. What, for instance, can be more opposed to all reverential thought than to speak of the Saviour's sufferings as if God delighted in them, as if God was appeased by them, as if they were a commercial equivalent which He accepted in lieu of other men's penalties, as if He must have His full measure of satisfaction in the infliction of pain before He could dismiss His anger and forgive. All this is the mere profanation of a great and awful sanctity. It is reducing the great mystery of divine sorrow to the level of the market-place, and making of Calvary nothing better than a heathen sacrifice. There are some things which could not be meant when it is said that Jesus was made sin for us. In no sense did He endure the wrath of God. In no sense was God's anger and indignation visited on Him. Our whole moral nature protests against the supposition that God's face could ever for a

moment be averted from the holy and undefiled One, or that He could cease to regard Him with infinite favour and joy. And it is just as true that there could be no transference of guilt to Him. Suffering may be transferred, penalties may be borne by the innocent for the transgressor, but the sinless soul can never by any possibility take the guilt of another, nor could God ever regard the divine sufferer as a guilty one. And therefore, in the strict sense of the word, there could be no punishment for the Saviour. Punishment implies the sense of guilt, the sense of demerit. Punishment is only felt when the sufferer knows that he has sinned, and in Jesus there was not and could not be any such consciousness of guilt. Whatever the agony of Gethsemane and the cross might be, this, at least, had no part in it. He took the sinner's place in bearing all his stripes, but He could not take the sinner's place in any sense of personal demerit. You may bear pains to save an evil-doer from his deserts, but if you do, those pains are not punishment to you. They are sorrow and humiliation, they are a vicarious cross, but there is no feeling of guilt in them. Christ bore our sins in His own body, on the tree, but He never suffered as a guilty one. It is needful to say these things to remove the vulgar misconceptions and misrepresentations of the doctrine of the cross, which have served to degrade it, and often prevented thoughtful men from accepting it.

How, then, did Jesus become sin for us? First, it is certain that He made Himself the victim of its wrath. He bore in His own sinless person the worst stripes that it could inflict. He allowed it to wreak its utmost malice upon Him, that He might give to the world an exhibition of its exceeding awfulness and malice. It is a thought which the apostles were always enforcing, that Christ condemned sin by dying for it, that He made it horrible in men's eyes by submitting to it. Human wisdom would never have guessed at this plan for making sin repulsive; it was a piece of that sweet foolishness of God which is wiser than men. For all other methods had proved of no avail. For thousands of years nature and law and conscience, prophets and moralists had been thundering out their denunciations of sin and declaring that its penalty was death. And it had been nearly in vain. The world still loved its sin, and would have its cup of guilty pleasure though flaming swords stood in the way. The dread of penalty had been no deterrent to the stubborn heart of men. And then there came one who was holy, undefiled, and separate from sinners, who retained for ever the unsullied purity of Godhead, whose thoughts were never stained with the world's lusts and greeds, and who had no part in the sad heritage of human guilt, who was the crown and glory of the human race, deserving nothing but the love of all men, because His heart was full of the love of all men. And He gave up His pure, spotless life to be dealt with as

sin might dictate. He let it work its will upon Him without protest or complaint. He bore its malice and envies and jealousies and outbreaks of passion. He suffered its cursings and defamings. He permitted it to inflict upon Him that which only the worst criminals deserved. And at last it slew Him with fiendish exultation, and had Him buried with the gleeful thought that it had seen the last of Him for ever. It was the one proof which the human heart wanted of its own awful depravity. It was a proof that man, if left to himself, that sin, if unchecked by divine grace, would slowly destroy all goodness, light, truth, and purity in the earth, and turn the world into a hell and humanity into animalism. And this was how that death of Jesus affected the hearts of all who believed in Him. They were roused to indignation against the sin which had so blindly misunderstood Him and so cruelly murdered Him. And ever since, the name of the cross has been a self-revelation. Men learn the sinfulness of sin in the light of Calvary, and wherever the image of the cross falls men see their own bad passions as in a glass and revolt from them. Christ has made sin hateful to His loved ones by letting it slay Him, and the world at last will catch the thought of that great sacrifice and revolt from sin because sin slew its King and Saviour.

Further, there runs through all the apostolic writings the thought that God exhibited His just indignation against sin in that spotless sacrifice.

There is a sense in which God could not forgive until He had made it manifest to all that the sin of men was horrible in His eyes. We ought never to forget, and cannot forget if we keep before us the whole teachings of the Bible, that God is not only a Father, but a righteous Father ; that He is a moral governor, that He rules by moral laws, that injustice and impurity are and must be for ever hateful to Him, and that He cannot pass over sin leniently and carelessly as if it were of no great moment. He has always been yearning to forgive His children, and clasp them to His breast in reconciliation. He has always been melting in pity over them. But for the satisfaction of His own holiness He could not do it until He had made them see how horrible sin was, until he had vindicated His own hatred of it in some signal way. It was a wonderful way. It was a way which the human heart would never have devised. Instead of pouring out His wrath upon the sinner, He let the sinner spend his malevolent wrath upon the sinless Saviour. Yet no one who ever thinks of the cross can doubt that it was effectual in this way. It not only revealed to men the iniquity of sin, but showed them what the heart of the great Father felt towards it. The cross always suggests these two thoughts to us—a thought of infinite pity and forgiveness, and a thought that God has there displayed His hatred of all sin ; and His forgiveness comes to us, not with the light, lenient words of one who is merely benevolent, and good-naturedly overlooks wrong-doing, but

in the words of a great sorrowful heart who shows us what pangs our sins have cost Him, and how hateful they have been to Him even as He pronounces pardon.

Let us remember also that every true scriptural view of the atonement represents God Himself as the sufferer. It is not that He puts upon another the curse of sin, that He accepts the satisfaction rendered by another, but that the very heart of the Father Himself is involved in that sacrifice. It is God in Christ reconciling the world unto Himself. The Scriptures speak of the lamb slain before the foundation of the world, and they tell us that in all their afflictions He was afflicted, and carried their sins all the days of old, as if the atonement had been a perpetual thing, as if there had always been sacrifice and suffering and sin-bearing in the heart of God. God Himself takes the stripes of the sinner upon Himself on Calvary, and suffers that He may vindicate His moral law, that He may prove how hateful sin is to Him, and that in suffering He may forgive.

There is a story told of a certain well-known school-master, that whenever a boy broke one of the rules of the school, he called up that boy, and instead of inflicting the penalty upon him, he asked the boy to take the rod in his hands and inflict stripes upon the master. He would not have the rules of the school broken with impunity, but he made himself the sufferer to vindicate them. It is said that no boy ever

went through that task without breaking down, and no boy ever broke a rule again who had passed through that discipline. It made law so sacred when the unoffending one was thus seen to bear its stripes, that an atmosphere of obedience and sanctity pervaded the whole school, and self-sacrificing love slew rebellion there.

We dare not offer this as an explanation of the great mystery of the cross. All human analogies fail in presence of that profound truth. But there may be something not unlike it in God's way of reconciling the world unto Himself. He vindicates His moral law, His righteous wrath, against sin by making Himself the chief sufferer from its penalties. He takes the stripes upon Himself, that all His children may know how awful sin and iniquity and violation of law are in His eyes—and then in the sanctity and pity of His pure affections, He clasps the sinner to His heart and forgives.

And truly the effect upon men's hearts of Calvary's suffering and love is like the effect produced in that school. It melts them with its tenderness, it kills their rebellion by its infinite grace. They break down at the thought that God in Christ should have taken upon Himself their stripes, that He should have suffered what they only deserved to suffer. The forgiveness which is granted on such terms does not make sin small in their eyes, but magnifies it until with all earnestness they revolt from it, and a spirit of obedience pervades the whole atmosphere of their

lives. They dare not wilfully grieve again the love that thus took their sins upon itself.

Now these are but crude words and imperfect hints on a great subject. In speaking them, I am powerfully conscious that they barely touch the theme, that they leave the great mystery still with profound depths unrevealed. And I am not greatly concerned whether or not you accept these or any other theories of the sacrifice of Jesus. For I return to the words with which I commenced, that a belief in the fact is everything, and that theories are of little consequence.

It is enough for every truly Christian thought and inspiration to know simply this : That Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, and that through Him we have forgiveness and reconciliation, and by faith are made partakers of His righteousness. He hath made Him to be sin for us, and who knew no sin.

VICTORY AFTER FAILURE

(*Good Friday*)

“But we hoped that it was He which should redeem Israel.”
—LUKE xxiv. 21.

THAT journey to Emmaus was perhaps the longest that these two disciples ever took, though it was but seven miles. For how weary and interminable seven miles are when the heart is sad, and weighted with the burden of a dead hope, and nothing can call your thoughts away from the grief which enfolds you in a great darkness. The most sorrowful hours of life are the hours which see its fairest hopes blasted, withered, dead, and there is nothing more left but to bury them tenderly and with tears, as we bury sweet dead children. This was a funeral march for the disciples. They were carrying a dead joy to its last long home. They would never see its face again. At least they thought so. It is one of the strangest incidents of the Resurrection story, and certainly one of the most pathetic, that these two men should have gone on telling a seeming stranger about that of which their heart was full, how the one they loved best was dead, how the voice which had been so tender and

wise was now for ever silent, how the great hopes which He had aroused in them had been cruelly shattered ; and that they should have been so absorbed in their mournful recital as never to look Him fairly in the face, or so blinded by their grief as not to recognise the face they knew best of all. He was by their side, yet they thought Him gone and lost for ever. They were repeating their dirge for the dead in the ears of Him who had just conquered death. They were telling Him the story of His own irreparable defeat and failure, telling it to the very person who stood before them crowned with victory and power. There is nothing in history or fiction stranger than that. Such hopeless sorrow and dull despair with such a heavenful of joy waiting at the door, such an hour of heaviness and heartbreak, and then the grand surprise, the ecstasy. One moment the sigh from life's most doleful depths, and then the height of vision and triumph and rapture. Yet it is the perpetual, the constantly repeated story of the faithful. Weeping endureth for a night and joy cometh in the morning. They that sow in tears shall doubtless come again rejoicing, bringing their sheaves with them. For a small moment have I forsaken thee, but with great mercies will I gather thee.

If one wished to sum up the incident of the Resurrection in a brief sentence, he might well speak of it as the greatest of all triumphs following the most disastrous and complete of all failures. There were three days in which it seemed that God's right-

hand was paralysed. God's truth stricken down, God's promises cast aside like waste-paper, and then the most signal of victories, the glorious vindication of His word, the awaking of the arm of the Lord, and the scattering of His foes.

The defeat, the failure, seemed indeed most crushing and hopeless, most tragically complete. The attitude of these two disciples represented the mood and conviction of all the disciples. Nothing can exceed the utter cheerlessness and dejection of their language: "We hoped that it was He which should redeem Israel." Their hope was a thing of the past, a dream which had vanished with the awaking, the sad memory of a joy which nothing could revive. They had resigned themselves sorrowfully and bitterly to the thought that all the expectations which He had aroused in them had been fair to the eye and false in the fact, that the palace of high hopes and ambitions which He had built had disappeared like a cloud. Of Him and His kingdom there was nothing left but a handful of dust in a sepulchre, the jeers of His enemies, and a small company of utterly wearied and dispirited followers. The highest goodness they had ever known was vanquished and destroyed by the mightier power of craft and evil. That was what the men thought who had loved Him best and believed in Him most confidently. That was what we should have felt if we had been in their place. It was what everyone thought who had been engaged either as an actor or a witness in the closing scenes

of the great ministry. Judged by any human standard, the life of Jesus had proved a misadventure and mistake. He had overrated His own powers, He had attempted what was impossible. With all its beauty, wisdom, heroism, and sublimity, it was a failure—a gigantic failure. If you had asked any of the witnesses of the recent tragedy, their answer would have been the same. Caiaphus and the priests would have told you that a dangerous pretender who was attacking their authority was effectually crushed. Pilate and the Romans would have said that the last had been heard of a religious enthusiast who was setting himself up as a king against Cæsar. Any impartial and calm-judging bystander, if any such there had been, would have deplored that so much goodness, self-devotion, and heroism should have perished and left no fruit behind. The Pharisees would have said: Thank God there is an end of Him who mocked at our sanctity and called us whited sepulchres! And the bewildered disciples would have acknowledged their perplexity and despair, and confessed that their hopes had been torn and mangled on that cross and their joy buried in that grave. Yes! it seemed indeed as if it had been all in vain, as if the purest purpose and the highest cause and the most godlike of souls had flung themselves against the evil of the world, only to be hurled back and broken to pieces in scorn; as if malice and selfishness and hatred were the conquering forces in the world, and divine goodness itself was powerless to cope with

them. And then came the sudden, the unexpected, the decisive triumph of the Resurrection, with its dramatic overturning of the world's facts and conclusions, its derision of enemies' boasts, its scattering of disciples' fears. The most complete of apparent failures was followed by the most signal and crowning victory that the world has ever seen. For that is now admitted by all. The most indifferent men, nay, the most unbelieving of men will confess as much as this. That there has never been a success so great, so widespread, so far-reaching, so wonderful, as that which He has gained who died a malefactor's death, whose disciples forsook Him and fled, whose life's sufferings and labours seemed in the hour of His death to be simply annihilated and stamped out. Divine love proved itself in that risen life mightier than hatred. It was the supreme triumph of goodness over evil, truth over prejudice and superstition, of righteousness and patience over the craft and insolence and violence of men. And of all the lessons which this life of lives has bequeathed to us, none is more fruitful than this in suggestions of patient waiting, continuance in well-doing, and abounding hopefulness. It tells us that goodness after all and in spite of all is the victorious power in the world, that all its defeats are temporary and apparent, and its ultimate success beyond doubt, that God's purpose cannot fail, that whatever is honest, pure, truthful, lovely, has a strength and vitality in it which no time can wear out and no

antagonism subdue, that he must win who sides with God, and that though *might* may seem right for a time, right is always might in the end. This lesson is needed more or less by all.

For defeat, failure, and disappointment are elements which enter into every life. There is no man, however successful he be, who has not to taste of that other cup. No man wins all that he strives for. No man attains all his hopes. Our hopes are like seeds of which only one in ten or even but one in fifty brings forth its expected fruit. The rest are caught up by the wind and carried away; or sink in the ground and die and are seen no more. Of all the magnificent possibilities and the glorious dreams of youth only one here and there is fully realised in after life. The man, as a poet says, is ever following the funeral of the boy, the funeral of bright anticipations never realised. The path of life is strewn with the corpses of fine projects and brilliant purposes crushed and trampled under foot. Even he who seems in the eyes of the world to have been most brilliantly successful, who has amassed great wealth or won great popularity, could tell you a different tale—of purposes broken off, of domestic sorrow which lies heavy on his heart, of a love that was denied him, of a bereavement which left his life lonely.

And in the life of faith and goodness and earnest endeavour, partial failure and defeat are inevitable. In our struggles with ourselves we never win such mastery over our besetting weaknesses and passions

as to call it by the word victory. We never gain all that we aim at, we never gain more than enough to shew us what might be. Still more in our labours for others, in our unselfish efforts to nurse and benefit others, in the part we take in any righteous and generous cause, we are subject to drawbacks, discouragement, failure, long-deferred hope, and even cruel disappointment. Is there any one who at any time has burned with some noble enthusiasm, some passionate dream of useful service, some hope of alleviating sorrow or saving men from ignorance and sin? Then I know that he has had hours of sad misgiving, when his faith well-nigh forsook him and his heart grew chill with despair. Ah, yes, every life has these dark moods. And when all is said and done, there is one failure which comes to all. There is the final doom. Every life, if judged and weighed merely by that which is seen, is at last a failure. For death comes, and all that a man has gathered, the intellect, the wealth, the stores of friendship and love, the honours and the pomp, go like the leaves driven before the wind. Yes, we all have to meet and to familiarise ourselves with the fact of failure. It is in some degree inevitable. What then? Well, then we turn to the teachings of the cross and comfort ourselves with the thought that all the failures and disappointments of goodness and of good and true men are but the channel, the means, the stepping-stones to higher things, to successes of a nobler

kind than have been aimed at, that God uses these as a discipline to prepare for the real crowns and triumphs of life. Righteousness fails, yet never fails. History is full of the records of failure that ended in honour and victory. Think of the man Louis Kossuth, the Hungarian. He laboured, taught, suffered, bled, endured prison, obloquy, was hunted with bloodhounds, hanged in effigy; the cause which he loved was trampled out, the people for whom he fought enslaved, everything was apparently lost for a time. He lived to see that cause triumphant, his name revered, his heroism and purity acknowledged by the world, and his death is still mourned by a whole nation in tears. So it is ever with godlike labours and godly lives. He who raised up Jesus from the dead is ever raising up defeated causes from the dust, quickening into new life the good and true principles which evil has for the time crucified, turning defeat into victory, and giving to those who have been sowing in tears the rejoicing of the golden harvest time. Oh, my friends, God's arm is not shortened, God's purpose cannot fail. If you trust in Him, no apparent failure can be real failure to you. Every present disappointment will be but a triumph deferred. The efforts and prayers which you have spent in striving after goodness, in reclaiming and saving others, in sowing the seeds of truth and purity in some wayward child, in pushing on some work of righteousness, are not wasted. The bread

cast on the waters will be found after many days. The echo of your voice will come rolling back after it has ceased and seemed lost in space, for it was not your voice but God's. Your life may be pronounced a failure. If it has been lived to God do not believe it. It can be no more a failure than was Christ's. And when you think of your dead—taken prematurely perhaps—in the fulness and ripeness of life, when you think of that cold form hidden in the grave, with nothing left of all the beauty and the strength, and when doubt whispers to you, What a dismal failure! give answer to your doubts in the language of Easter morning. It is death that has been beaten and vanquished, not life. The life of them that trust in Him is immortal victory.

THE TWO GARDENS

(Good Friday)

“He went forth with His disciples over the brook Cedron, where was a garden.”—JOHN xviii. 1.

“Now in the place where He was crucified there was a garden.”—JOHN xix. 41.

THE Bible tells us of three gardens which have become way marks in the history of humanity. To say that they are famous is true enough, if by fame we mean to be everywhere talked of—for every child in a Christian land at least knows their names—Eden, Gethsemane, Calvary. But for two of them we need a better word than famous. They are sacred. We cannot speak of them without dropping the voice in solemn awe, without a pathetic quivering of the lips. They are consecrated and in a sense immortalised in every Christian heart and mind, for there words were spoken which the world can never forget, and there a divine drama was enacted which gave a new meaning and direction to the whole course of human history, and there do our thoughts always linger when our thoughts are at their highest point

of devotion. Gethsemane and Calvary! They were both gardens. What fruits and flowers grew in them then we do not know. But we know something of the fruits which they have yielded since—wonderful fruits, inexhaustible, medicine and healing for all the wounds of men. He *made* them gardens indeed, for one of them was watered by His tears and both felt His blood-drops.

There is surely something suggestive in the fact that the place where He fought through His great agony and sweat great drops of blood, and the place where He suffered His last humiliation and endured His final cross were places of exceeding beauty; places which nature seemed to have prepared rather for bridal gaieties than for life's terrible tragedies. The gardens of Jerusalem had all that loveliness in which poets revel, and just then was the opening of Eastern summer, when verdure and flowers were in their sweet young perfection. And all this would be before Him as He slowly walked to that place where the brutal betrayer was to find Him. And all this would be before Him as He hung nailed upon the fearful cross. We can even imagine that the same breeze which brought to Him the near and far-off shouts of His murderers would bring also the sweet scent of flowers, and that as He turned His eyes from the fierce and scornful faces of His enemies, they would fall on citron trees and almonds, and trailing vine branches, glorious in their luxuriant verdure. On the one hand in-

expressible sorrow and ghastly human sin, and on the other hand nature in its quiet beauty, and some of the fairest scenes in God's fair world. Now, our first thought is this :

1. That God's world of material beauty has no consolations for the heaviest human sorrows. Nature is dumb when the keenest anguish appeals to it for sympathy. It sings us lullabies when we are tired, and helps to make us calm when we are feverish and worried, and preaches to us of goodness and purity when we turn to it, weary from the ways of an evil world ; but it has no voices to cheer our desperate hours and no medicine for heartbreak. The agony of Gethsemane was endured in a garden. It was a place where Jesus had often been both alone and with His disciples. It was a favourite resort. He loved these quiet solitudes, gardens and mountain sides, and retired spots where God's works were not marred by the misdoings of men. He loved nature. He loved trees and flowers and birds. They spoke to Him. They told Him of the Father's goodness. They witnessed to divine omnipresence. They whispered quieting and soothing words to Him after the strain and wear of daily temptation and conflict. But in the hour of His anguish all this failed. The cup which he had to drink in Gethsemane was no less bitter because there was an earthly paradise about Him. Nature could not wipe away one of those blood-drops or soothe one pang of that fearful hour. He just fell back upon

the Father, and an angel came to strengthen Him. Yes, people tell us that nature is healing, that nature is the kindest of nurses, that nature can lift us above our worries, and cares, and strifes, and ambitions, and help us to forget our losses and vexations and troubles. And all that is true up to a certain point, but beyond that, when the saddest hours of life are upon us, how utterly all those consolations fail! One cannot but think that for the Saviour in those gardens to see nature all joyous and serene, the flowers blooming in the face of His agony, and to hear the birds carolling carelessly while He was groaning with His great travail, would but sharpen His cry of bitterness and loneliness. You know how the glory of the summer time affects you in hours of anguish and bereavement. You need untroubled hearts to fully enjoy the wonderful peace of nature. In hours of mental storm and anguish it only mocks you. The chamber of death is never so gloomy as when the rich June sunlight floods the world outside and the trees are gorgeously arrayed, and there is glad, careless life everywhere except in that one dark spot. The contrast is appalling. How cruel it seems that the earth should flaunt its mirth in view of our suffering! that all the light and life should stare insolently into the face of our woe, that the birds should sing their glad songs when our hearts are in despair, that it should all go on just the same as if it mattered not the least about one breaking heart! Nature

has no feeling at these times and no sympathy. If we know no religion but what nature teaches, hope utterly dies at such times. No! we have then to fall back, as Jesus did, on that great, all-pitiful Father, that tearful sympathetic Father whom nature hides rather than reveals. And happy are we if when the world of outward beauty fails us we can turn to the eternal beauty whose name is long-suffering Love. The Redeemer's saddest hours were passed in a garden.

2. The foulest sins have been done in the fairest scenes. These gardens of the Bible are all overshadowed by the hovering and besetting presence of the prince of evil. Satan creeps into the first garden and darkens the whole world by bringing in sin. Man fell and brought upon himself the curse of a guilty conscience in a paradise where there was everything to uplift his imagination and keep his heart unstained. And that has been typical of humanity throughout. It was in the most beautiful places of Galilee and Judæa that Christ met with the most cruel rejections and received the most cruel usage. It was within sight of the holy and beautiful temple that they took up stones to cast at Him. It was on the vine-clad slopes of lovely Olivet that one of His disciples did the darkest deed of treachery that the world has ever known. And in a garden they crucified Him. His murderers had chosen one of the sweetest spots about Jerusalem for their infamous deed. They had come into the midst of olive groves and vineyards, where the

tender grass carpeted the paths and flowers adorned the earth like jewels, to do the shamefullest deed that was ever done. It was as if their design had been to set off the foulness of their sin against the beauty of God's work, and man's fiercest hatred and malice against God's manifested goodness and love.

And thus has it ever been. Just in the places where men ought to have been most deeply impressed with purifying influences, has sin had its guiltiest revels. In the garden of Rome Nero lived a devil's life. In the lovely parks of Fontainebleau the kings of France grovelled like pigs. Amid the soft and dreamy splendour of Italy, popes and princes and people fell to the sensual level of hell. It is always where every prospect pleases that man seems to become most vile. There cruelty and lust find their most congenial home. There the devil holds his supreme court. Wise men tell us that if we could only bring the people into communion with nature and show them all the beauties of God's works, they would need no other agencies to convert them and make them honest and sober and pure. If we could only lead them out from the squalor and reek and dull dingy places of the city to where the flowers grow, and the fresh air blows, and put grass under their feet, and trees waving over their heads, it would refine their tastes, and elevate their thoughts and give a sort of holiness to their affections and character. Yes, no doubt it would do something—something considerable. John Ruskin says: If I could

have my way, I would give every man in this island a little plot of garden to cultivate. It would help to make him a healthy-souled man to smell the sweet soil as he turned it up and watch the flowers grow, and see kindly nature working always for his good. Yes, and we should all like to see Ruskin's wish fulfilled. It would put a little more of the rose of health upon the pale, worn faces of tired factory workers, and possibly put a little more moral health into their souls by giving them something sweet and innocent to occupy their leisure hours. But John Ruskin was far too good a Christian to forget, that in the place where they crucified Him, there was a garden, and that where earth is made like heaven on its outward face the men who walk there may still have their hearts and feet in hell. Those who believe in the regenerating power of parks and gardens have a great deal of faith in human nature ; but not much knowledge of human history, and still less knowledge of human sinfulness. Men are not made saints by gazing on flower-beds and walking on meadows, or even by watching mountains, and seas, and sunsets. The disease of sin lies too deep for that kindly ointment to touch. We may crucify all goodness even in a garden. In fact, nature only speaks of God to the godly soul. It only breathes purity into those who are already in some measure pure. If men carry their lusts and passions with them, the divinest and holiest scenes on earth will but foster and feed those lusts and passions. Men go

to spend their hours of holiday in the world's gardens and come home staggering drunk. We do not rise from nature up to nature's God; though that word is so oft repeated. We must find God first and learn to rejoice in Him through a renewed heart and sanctified affections, before we shall see Him and delight in Him as we behold the works of His hands. Nature is only religiously and morally edifying to the moral and religious soul. You must feel the power of the spirit of God before you can appreciate God's sermons in nature. You must see something of His beauty in the cross before you can rightly understand that other beauty. The pure and loving heart finds God walking in every garden. But the unclean and selfish heart will find only occasion of sin there. Judas gave the traitor's kiss in a garden, and in a garden they crucified the Lord of life.

Think of these things, my brethren, in the glad spring and summer time which are coming presently. You will be going out—some of you at least—most of you perhaps more or less to seek refreshment, rest, and change, in one or other of earth's fair scenes. You will be where nature is arrayed in queenly robes, or where mountains soar, or where the everlasting murmur of the sea is heard. And these ought to help your religious lives, to elevate your thoughts, and paint your imagination with colours almost divine. But take care that you carry your religion with you, for some people seem to

leave it at home when they go on these holiday jaunts, and almost forget that they are Christians until they come back again. Carry worship in your hearts and you will find worship waiting for you there and perhaps return as you ought to do, loving God more than ever for all His goodness and beauty. But remember that temptation awaits you there, and that in the midst of all that is beautiful sin may harden conscience and blot out God.

And may there not be for all of us, whether we are at home or abroad—may there not be remembrances of the highest things furnished us by the exceeding beauty of nature at this vernal time. The earth spreads around us like one garden of the Lord. And sometimes as we look at it we may give at least a passing thought to that garden where one sorrowed as never man sorrowed, and that other garden where the divine Master finished His life in agony and shame to save the world which He loved. Gethsemane, Calvary, everything which reminds us of them, is as helpful as a sacrament. And the beauty of this earth to-day should make us think of them. For the beauty was there as He knelt in that agony of prayer, and in the place where they crucified Him was a garden.

A LIVING HOPE

(*Easter*)

“Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His great mercy, who hath begat us again unto a living hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead.”—I PETER i. 3.

THESE words were not written for Easter Sunday, nor written expressly for the day of resurrection, they were intended for all days. For it is quite certain, that the Apostolic Church made the whole year an Easter festival. I mean that it preserved for every day use and enjoyment, the inspiring memories and hopes which the risen Lord had suggested. Yet these words are pre-eminently a text for the day. They express the one great sweet thought, which we associate with Easter, the thought of hope. That word is the key-note of all our glad Easter songs. Easter comes to us, like the face of an ever young angel, or an immortal child, with hope shining in its eyes. It comes to us as the spring flowers, and the singing of the birds come after the dreary cheerless winter; or, as the hymn puts it, “like some sweet summer morning, after a night of pain.” It paints

our sky, and earth, and air, with this one word hope. And to all who mourn, or from any cause are cast down, it gives beauty for ashes, the oil of joy for mourning, and the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness. Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath begotten us again unto a living hope, by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead.

A living hope. That needs no interpretation. You have only to read it against its opposite—"a dead hope." You all know what that is; you have all shivered over your dead hopes. Dead hopes are like dead children, beautiful, may be, even in death, but how sad and heart-breaking to look upon. Every one, as he passes through the pilgrimage of life, has to leave behind him dead hopes which he buried with tears; the fortune which he was going to win, and which failed, the ambition which he was going to realise, and which eludes his grasp; the human love which was going to be his possession for life, and which deserts or betrays him; the child, who was going to be the strength and joy of his old age, and which death snatches from him. No need to explain to you what dead hopes mean. You have all seen their pale ashen faces; you have turned away with heavy hearts from their grave. And so you understand what the Apostle means by a living hope. A hope which sets your hearts beating with thoughts of a glad to-day and a brighter to-morrow, a hope which flushes your horizon with golden glory, which inspires you and

sends you forth to your labours strong with a giant's strength, a hope which is all beauty, sunshine, and song. Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who begat us again unto a living hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead. I remind you :—

I. That these words exactly describe what the disciples felt on the day of resurrection. It was the restoration and revival of their dead hopes. The crucifixion and burial of their Lord had crucified and buried every bright and joyous thought. Their love was gone, their life's work was gone, their strength was gone ; the whole fabric which they had been building had fallen to pieces, and disappeared like a palace of clouds. They thought that they would never again see the face which had been to them like heaven, or hear again the voice which had been sweeter than all music. Their hope was blasted, withered, and dead. It had left nothing but the sad memory of a joy which nothing could revive. They had resigned themselves bitterly to the thought that all the expectations which He had aroused in them had been fair to the eye and false in fact. The kingdom of which He spoke had been an idle dream ; His promises had been the creatures of a wild imagination, He had deceived them and been deceived Himself. Nothing remained of all that He had been and done but a handful of dust in a sepulchre, and the jeers of them that passed by. The highest goodness which they had known was

vanquished and destroyed, and the powers of evil were triumphant. That was what the men thought who had loved Him best and believed in Him most confidently. That is what we should have felt if we had been in their place. It was what every one thought who had been engaged either as an actor, or spectator in that tragedy on Calvary. Judged by any ordinary human standard, the life of Jesus had proved a disastrous and humiliating failure. With all its beauty, wisdom, and sublimity, it was a failure! a gigantic failure! Every one who had been a witness of His death would have told you the same thing. Caiaphus and the priests would have told you that a dangerous pretender, who was attacking their authority, had been effectually crushed and silenced. Pilate and the Romans would have said that the last had been heard of a religious enthusiast who was setting Himself up as a King against Cæsar. The Pharisees would have said, Thank God there is an end of Him who mocked our sanctity and called us whited sepulchres. And the dejected disciples would have wrung their hands in despair and confessed that it was all over; that they had been pursuing a rainbow and it had vanished. It seemed indeed as if the purest purpose and the highest cause and the most Godlike of souls had flung themselves against the evil of the world, only to be hurled back and broken to pieces, and as if malice, selfishness, and hatred were always to be the conquering forces of the world. Dead hopes! those words expressed the situation.

And then came the sudden and decisive triumph of the resurrection, with its over-turning of the world, facts, and conclusions, its derision of enemies' boasts, its scattering of disciples' fears. The most complete of apparent failures was followed by the most signal victory that the world has seen. In the risen form of Jesus, Divine love and goodness reasserted themselves, proved that they were stronger than death and hell, mightier than malice, hatred, sin, and all the powers of darkness, and that they must go on conquering and to conquer. Dead hopes rose again with Him to life. Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who begat us again unto a living hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead. And now I go on to say:

2. That in the resurrection of our Lord Jesus, there is always a revival and renewal of decaying, withered, and dead hopes. It is the answer to all our cries of dejection. It is the angel thought that comes to cheer us in every hour of failure and disappointment. For it tells us that goodness after all, and in spite of all, is the victorious power in the world. It tells us that the failures of goodness and of good men are not final, but only for a time. It tells us that the promises which seem to be broken are as firm and faithful as the everlasting mountains or as the throne of God itself. It tells us that in the life of faith every dark and despondent hour is followed by its morning of hope and divine sunshine.

This lesson is needed by all of us. For defeat,

failure, and disappointment enter into every life. There is no man, however successful he be, who has not to taste of that other cup. No man wins all that he strives for. No man converts all his ambitions and dreams into facts. Our purposes are broken off. Our hopes are like seeds of which only one in five, or perhaps one in twenty, brings forth its fruit unto perfection. The rest are caught up by the wind and carried away, or sink in the ground and die and are seen no more. Of all the possibilities and glorious dreams of youth, only one here and there is fully realised. The man, as a poet says, is ever following the funeral of the boy, the funeral of bright anticipations never fulfilled. The path of life is marked with the graves of dead hopes. Even he who seems in the eyes of his fellow-men to have been most brilliantly successful could tell you another story of fine projects nipped in the bud, of domestic sorrows which lie heavy on his heart, of a love that was denied him, of a bereavement which left his life lonely.

That is true of all men. It is not less true of men and women who are living the life of faith and earnest endeavour. They know perhaps better than others what partial defeat, failure, and frustrated hopes mean, simply because they aim at higher things. In our fight against temptation and besetting sins we never win such complete mastery as to call it victory. We are often cast down ; we never gain more than just enough to show us what might be and is not. Still

more, in our labours for others, in our efforts to save men and advance righteous ends, we are subject to weary discouragements and cruel disappointments. Every one who goes into the battle with ardour and eager hopefulness comes like the disciples to places where hope fails and the heart grows chill with despair. We have all these dark moods. When living hope has become dead hope, and life seems to be best spelled by the word failure. And last of all there comes to every one that most dismal of failures—death. For that to the outward eye is the most tragical and complete of failures, when all that a man has gathered of wisdom, wealth, friendships, and honour, goes like the leaves driven before the wind, and every hope is buried as the words are spoken, “dust to dust.” What then? Well, then, we turn again to the story of the resurrection. There we see dead hopes clothed again with immortal life and coming out of their graves crowned with beauty and gladness. There we see the weeping which endures for a night and the joy which comes in the morning. There we see that the failures and disappointments of goodness and good men are but the hard and weary path to higher things, and the stepping-stones to greater joys and gains than the heart could imagine. There we learn that righteousness fails and yet never fails. There we learn that in the fight with sin, faith is often worsted but never beaten, often cast down but always triumphant in the end. There we are taught that God’s purpose holds on its way and

laughs to scorn all who would turn it aside. There we are reminded that the everlasting and Almighty love of God has its arms around us, even though we hang upon a cross or go down to the grave. And there we learn that death itself is not a dismal tragedy at all, but more like an ascension song and a crowning victory. There all our downcast thoughts are lifted up. Christ is risen, and we rise with Him. "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath begotten us again unto a living hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead." Let me say finally :

3. That these words, a living hope, are peculiarly appropriate to the present time. We need that particular Easter lesson more than usually just now. A living hope, a hope that is not easily frightened out of its strength and cheerfulness. A hope that lives on through all the glooms, depressions, and cowardly fears of other men. There is a great deal of stupid, causeless, weak, and infectious pessimism about. People are talking dolefully about the evil times which are upon us or are coming. They look forward and see nothing but thick clouds getting thicker and darker. They are murmuring and muttering concerning the nation, Ichabod. They see written on the walls, Mene Tekel. One man hears it from another that we are on the verge of disaster, calamity, and every other dismal thing, and he goes and repeats it to a second person, and the second person carries it straightway to a third, and so it

spreads, until nine-tenths of the people come to believe it. Men who ought to know better do it. Christian writers in the press dip their pens in gall and set forth all their melancholy forebodings. Men full of the faith of Jesus Christ forget themselves and pose as Cassandras and Jeremiahs. Men are talking just as the disciples might have talked, and no doubt did talk, when Jesus was lying dead in that sepulchre. They are saying the glory is departed, the powers of ill are abroad; the future is pitch dark, and hard, grievous times are approaching. And the surest way to bring on hard and grievous times is for everybody to talk about them and think they are coming. And I say that all such talk, whether it comes from Christian men or others, is the talk of weak hearts and cowardly unbelief. It is giving the lie to the great Easter lesson of hope. For that I repeat again is the great thought and message of Easter—*Hope*. It comes to whisper cheerfulness and to scatter gloom. It sounds out those old, ever-dear words of the Master: Fear not, O ye of little faith, wherefore do ye doubt. It bids us look up to the mountains, sky, and heaven, and not down into the grave. It points us to the sunrise, and not to falling stars. It bids us remember that we are children of the day and not pilgrims of the night. It reminds us that the power of Jesus' resurrection is always in the world, always working to bring things on to the better day. It reminds us that Divine love abides—changeless, undefeated, ever victorious in the end. Its message is all gladness,

balm to the wounded heart, and the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness. And so may its lessons come home to us to-day, making us abound in hope. Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who, according to His great mercy, hath begat us again unto a living hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead.

THE RESURRECTION THE BEGINNING AND PROOF OF NEW LIFE AND HOPE FOR ALL

(Easter)

“For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive. But every man in his own order : Christ the first fruits ; afterward they that are Christ’s at His coming.”—I COR. xv. 22-23.

THE close of the first passion week left the disciples the most dejected men on the face of the earth. Yet before another day had passed, they were raised from the dust on wings of hope and joy into a very heaven of satisfaction. Easter day not only gave them back the risen Christ, but with Him restored to them also their lost faith, their crucified hopes, their darkened and vanished sunshine. Then were they glad when they saw the Lord.

Easter day brings to all Christians now a measure of the same radiant joy. In passion week our thoughts are necessarily touched with sombre colours, for they move about the place where He was crucified—lovely, mournful Calvary. But after that comes the day of resurrection, and paints our

sad thoughts with the roseate and golden colours of a heavenly clime.

This ought to be the gladdest day of the Christian year, and perhaps to most of us it is. There is fragrance in its memories. There is young life and elation in its breath, and its songs are all ascension songs. And yet the gladness of this day has behind it the two gruesomest facts of life—death and the grave. They are the two things which we dread most, which we try not to think of unless we are forced, and which we rarely mention without a shudder or a sigh. They are the skeletons which we hide away and endeavour to forget. Except on this Easter day! To-day we can bear to think of death because we see behind its unwelcome form the shining face of Him who conquered it. We can bear to think of the grave, because this day speaks to us of one grave that could not hold its tenant, which was robbed of its terrors, and made the birth-place of a new and mightier life. Our Easter thoughts are grouped around a sepulchre and the mourners who had come to take a last look at their loved one. Yes! but they are all exultant thoughts keyed to a triumphant *Te Deum*, because in the midst of that sepulchre scene stands one over whom death had no power, who is alive for evermore, and whose presence changes the darkness into light and the sighing into song.

Now the Apostle in the words which I have read to you, beautifully introduces a thought of spring-

time into Easter day. The spring season was opening when our Lord rose from the dead, as it is opening now. The earth was just beginning to stir from its winter deadness into sweet young life, and to put on new and beautiful garments. There were signs and promise everywhere of a widespread renewal and recreation. Life in all its wealth, luxuriance, and manifold loveliness, was springing up from death and decay. And in all this St Paul saw a figure of Christ's resurrection and the recreating forces which would result from it.

The old humanity represented by Adam is like the dead winter. It is subject to decay and corruption. It is morally dead, dead to love and hope, and dead to God, with no possibility of spiritual growth and spiritual beauty. As children of Adam we are fallen creatures, creatures of flesh, and sense, and carnal lusts, sinful and therefore dying, for sin kills all that is good, and spiritual, and divine.

But the new humanity, which is to rise with Christ, is to be made with Him after the power of an endless life. By His risen might it is to be raised from sin and the corruption and moral deadness which sin involves, and to expand into all His spiritual beauty and immortal perfection. A recreated and glorified humanity is to be the final outcome of the great resurrection fact. "As in Adam all die, so in Christ shall all be made alive."

And now, in working out this thought, St Paul points us to the risen Christ:

I. As the first fruits of a great harvest, as the beginnings and pledge of all the better and diviner things which are to be. "Christ the first fruits, and afterward they that are Christ's." The figure is pre-eminently suggestive. It conveys a whole world of promise. The first fruits make us think of all that the vernal season holds in its womb. We see fresh, delicate, green life appearing after the hard, bleak, colourless winter time. A new world is travailing for birth. Nay, it is already born, its sweet baby face appears. The vital forces which have been slumbering and buried awake from their sleep, shake themselves from the dust, and clothe themselves with strength and beauty. The meadow grass renews its youth, shapeless seeds and bulbs expand into many-coloured flowers, trees array themselves with leaf and bud and blossom, and the pastures and hedgerows put on the ornaments of a bride. These are the first fruits, and we welcome them with hearts full of gratitude. They are beautiful in themselves, apart from all that they promise, beautiful to old man and little child. The whole earth seems richer to us when we spy the first violet or hold in our hands the earliest tuft of primroses. It is like young first love or the first taste of heaven.

But the first fruits are still more precious to us for what they promise. Hope is painted on every leaf; in every bud there is a prophecy, in every young blade of grass an assurance given that the whole earth is going to be made new. The power

which has raised these beginnings of life and loveliness will multiply itself in millions and millions of other graceful forms until every stretch of barren soil is like the garden of the Lord, and the whole land is covered with the glory and luxuriance of summer and harvest time.

And that is how we are to think of the risen Christ. He is the first fruits. Beautiful in Himself. His rising from the dead was in itself a great, transcendent, mighty fact. It proved His truthfulness, His divinity, His atoning work. It set the seal upon all that He claimed to be and did. It gave us a faith, a religion, and a sure foundation for all our hopes. It was in itself the grandest fact in human history.

But it is even grander in its predictive significance. It is a springtime which points to a whole world of summer fruitfulness. It is the first fruits of a new creation. It is the sign and promise of millions and millions of other facts like unto itself. The power which raised Jesus from the dead only shewed its beginning in Him, brought forth its first flower of perfection in Him, raised Him from the dead as the herald and forerunner of countless other quickened and ascended lives. The same power is to go on working. It is never to be withdrawn. It can never cease. It is inexhaustible. It is in the world to-day, in the midst of human life. It is present in every chamber of sickness and death, and by every grave side, linking itself with human

weakness, overcoming human fear, wrestling with human temptation, and destroying sin, producing faith and righteousness, and the heavenly mind, and Christlikeness, and golden hopes. It is working mightily, irresistibly, slowly, making all things new, and subduing all things unto itself.

That is the promised harvest time of which Christ's resurrection was the opening bud and flower. "As in Adam all die, so in Christ shall all be made alive. But every man in his own order, Christ the first fruits, and afterward they that are Christ's at His coming."

2. St Paul invites us to think of the after fruits. Christ risen the first fruits and afterwards. What is that afterwards? What is the outcome of that resurrection fact? Well, first of all, the after fruits are all our sweetest beliefs, all the proofs and assurances we need, to make us feel that our labour is not in vain, that life is worth living and death not dying.

Believing in Christ's resurrection, we believe in fifty other things which are like sunshine and music to us. They follow inevitably from that one fact, as the summer fruit grows out of springtime.

First, the belief that nothing truly divine ever dies or can die. Our Lord was brutally slain. To human eyes He died. Yet in a deeper sense He died not. They tried to destroy His innocence and purity, His human pity and saving power, His kingship, priesthood, and divinity; they destroyed none of them, because those things were indestructible as God

Himself. That which is God-given and God-like is immortal and imperishable. Whatever is best in us, whatever is divine, whatever is begotten by the spirit of Christ, is proof against all the wasting forces of life and death. Our evil and coarse and earthly parts will die, our lusts and envies and selfish ambitions will perish, our carnal bodies, with all their animal appetites, will dissolve into the dust from which they came. There will be no resurrection of the worn-out husk and useless shell. That with all its sinful belongings will be done with for ever.

But the pure intelligence, the high and noble thoughts, the generous emotions, the love of goodness, the refined affections and sanctified friendships, and all that we have gained and kept in the moral and spiritual struggle, will abide for ever. For they are all of God, they are all of Christ. They have the stamp of immortality upon them. They will come forth from the grave as Christ came forth. They are the after fruits which will be perfected at Christ's coming.

This also is among the after fruits. Our belief that no divine purpose can be frustrated or defeated. The forces of evil are powerless when they set themselves against a thought of the Almighty lover. The resurrection of Jesus proved that once and for ever. His whole story from beginning to end is a record of persistent opposition. All the powers of the world combined against one apparently helpless life. Herod tried to destroy the young child. Synagogues

endeavoured to stone and silence the young prophet ; rulers, Scribes, and Pharisees persistently plotted to bring His work to nought ; and finally Roman magistrate and Jewish priest, backed by all the forces of authority, and all the fury of the mob, armed with wrath, hatred, cunning, and malice, did their utmost to overthrow His saving design. And yet it came forth uninjured and victorious on the day of resurrection.

And in that we read a promise which touches a thousand other things. God's thoughts move on, delayed but never arrested. The gates of hell and the powers of evil cannot prevail against them. God's justice, God's mercy, God's sweet love, were vindicated on that resurrection day. They stood forth as the immortal, eternal, and unconquerable things, the greatest forces in the universe, trampling on the world, the flesh, and the devil. And there we get assurance concerning the whole conflict between right and wrong, between Christ and all that is opposed to Him, that the final victory must and shall be with Him. All our best and largest hopes for humanity and the world grow out of the fact which we keep in mind to-day ; these hopes are the after fruit.

3. Among the after fruits are all the promises and assurances which comfort and restore us in the hours of weariness and disappointment. The resurrection of Jesus was the grandest and gladdest surprise in the world's history. It was the brightest of days following the most dismal of nights. It

was the most complete and unlooked for victory coming after utter collapse and defeat. For until the glorious rising from the dead came, it seemed to be all woe, disaster, and uttermost failure and disgrace, strength wasted, sorrow endured for nought, love spilt like water on the ground. There was nothing left apparently of all that He had attempted and done, except a lump of silent dust in a sepulchre, and a company of broken-hearted men.

And then came the triumphant issue, the wonderful changing of midnight into morning, and the song of victory which will be sung for ever. Out of all that sorrow and weariness, this poem of gladness, this heaven of sunshine came.

And now to us, and to all believing men, the lesson comes, bringing perpetual good cheer on its wings, telling us that the greatest joy often springs from the deepest sorrow, and that the darkest night is followed by the fairest morning. These strengthening beliefs are the after fruits.

And yet the best of the after fruits are still to come. We know not yet what the power of Christ's resurrection will accomplish in our lives. We have only felt the fringe of that power. Faith has far higher ascents to make, far more holiness to gain and joy unspeakable. The promise of the apostle points onward to a fruitfulness in our lives, to an elevation and purity in our lives, like that of Christ Himself. A great world unrealised lies before us. Christ the first fruits, afterward they that are Christ's at His coming.

KEEPING IN REMEMBRANCE THE RISEN ONE

(*Easter*)

“Remember Jesus Christ, risen from the dead, according to my Gospel.”—2 TIM. ii. 8.

THIS was what the aged Paul said to his young friend and brother Timothy. It was such a charge as a father might have given to a son, and here, indeed, it was something like a dying father's commission to the son whom he was leaving behind, and who was in a measure to take his place. Paul had finished his course, and was about to quit the scene of his noble warfare. Timothy had just entered the fight with all a young man's energy and enthusiasm, but with little experience. He had been made a bishop or pastor of the church at Ephesus. It was a burdensome, dangerous, and terribly responsible position. There was the little Christian community in a city twice or three times the size of our own. Half a million pagans, and the Christians could be counted by tens. At the most they were perhaps two or three hundreds. And the people by whom they were surrounded were not only idolatrous but

passionately devoted to their idolatry—they lived upon it, and prospered by it. It filled their city with wealthy visitors. For Ephesus was a place of pilgrimage—a sort of Mecca or Jerusalem. Its temple Diana was world-famed. Its priests were formidable, both in number and influence—its religious festivals were gorgeous revels and magnificent scenic displays. All the interests of the city, therefore, were dependent on the maintenance of this system. Commerce, politics, pleasure, and superstition joined hand in hand to uphold and defend it. And now picture this handful of Christians setting at defiance the popular belief, and going about endeavouring to persuade men that everything about them was a delusion and a lie. You can imagine what prejudices they would excite, what fears they would suggest, what scorn they would provoke, what blind hatred and fury they would stir up. And then think of the young bishop or leader of this little flock, prominent in danger as he was first in office, foremost in defence and attack, required to maintain his own fortitude, and stimulate the courage of his brethren in their apparently forlorn hope. That was the position. Paul understood well what the thoughts, feelings, and temptations of his young friend would be, and he wrote this along with many other words, to fire his ardour and strengthen his resolution: “Bear in remembrance Jesus Christ raised from the dead.” Not simply to remember it as we recall an incident for a moment and then dis-

miss it. No! but to have before his mind at all times the image, the person of Him who had been once for all victorious over death, and was now alive and clothed with conquering might for evermore.

I. And first, you will see that St Paul was giving here what had been the sustaining and inspiring thought of his own ministry. According to my gospel he writes, He himself had seen the risen One. He was as sure of it as of any fact in his life. The once crucified had appeared to him and spoken to him, not in a dream or by some trick of imagination, but in unmistakable and substantial reality. And that sight had changed the heart and character of the man, turned his thoughts completely round, and filled him with a sublime loftiness of will and purpose. That image of the risen One never faded out of his eyes. It was present to him always, through toils, perils, journeyings, his companion in every hour of loneliness. It cheered him in failure, strengthened him in weakness, comforted him in pain and weariness, infused into him a serene courage in all his conflicts. He saw it clearly now as he sat chained in prison penning his last letter and awaiting the stroke of death. The inspiring energy of that unfading image had never failed him. And now he passes it on to Timothy. Keep before thy mind Jesus Christ risen from the dead. Keep it before thee at all times, when the hardship is upon thee which comes to every good soldier of Christ. When thou art called to suffer for Him, when thou art

tempted to deny Him, when thou art wrestling with temptation, when thou art trembling with the consciousness of thine own weakness, when the work of the day seems more than thou canst bear and the evening time brings sad and despondent thoughts, when companions fall from thy side and thou art left to fight alone, when the appalling wickedness around thee makes thee sick at heart and thou art weary and desperate because of the slow progress of the truth—then let that ever-living form stand before thee. Bear Him in remembrance as He now is, risen and victorious. Think what He was and how He suffered, toiling to utter weariness, His life one long humiliation, everywhere despised and rejected, disappointment the cup which He drank every day, betrayed, denied, deserted, by those He trusted most. He endured more than thought can compass, and died in what seemed utter and shameful defeat. And now think of Him alive, almighty, enthroned in glory, conqueror of death, triumphant over those who crucified Him, the ever-living strength of His servants, the ever-watchful guardian of His Church, who can never forget or fail thee, beneath whose gaze thou servest, and by whose love thou shalt be crowned. Remember Jesus Christ raised from the dead.

2. And now, my brethren, that inspiring word is given to us. No more impressive and stimulating word can be thought of for the wear of labour and the strain of conflict. We are especially reminded of it to-day on the anniversary of our Lord's resurrection. But

it is not to be the passing recollection of an annual season. It is to be an abiding memory in our lives, a permanent vision, a picture almost as vividly and constantly before us as the glaring, visible, substantial world which presses upon our outward senses. Keep in mind the image of the risen One. It will revive your drooping faith, it will disperse your nervous fears, it will make you strong in the confidence of hope. First, when your hearts fail you on account of the Church and the slow progress of Christ's Kingdom, when you measure the difficulties which obstruct it, and the huge mass of sin, darkness, corruption, and prejudice arrayed against it, when you hear timid unbelief whispering, or arrogant scepticism shouting in bravado that Christianity is declining and the name of Jesus losing its power—then set before yourselves the image of Him who is alive for evermore, who has made the Church a part of His own life, who has promised to be with it until its work is done, and has pledged His own existence that it shall not die or fail out of the earth. Ever remember how He has kept that pledge through all the centuries. How His almighty guardianship and animating forces have preserved the Church from dissolution, and rekindled its zeal and raised it from the sleep of lethargy, and delivered it from the grave clothes of corruption. Think how again and again He has brought it forth from fire and water into a wealthy place, and given it revival fervours and pentecostal renewals, and the immortal

freshness of youth for decaying age, and the oil of joy for mourning, and the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness. Constantly has it risen again from its many defeats and humiliations, even as He rose, to advance with triumphant power over wider fields of conquest. And so it will ever be unless the world can crucify Him a second time and bury him beyond the reach of another resurrection, which it never can. Brethren, whenever you have any fear for the Church, think of what Paul says here: "Bear in remembrance Jesus Christ risen from the dead."

Think of it, again, in all your own Christian labours. When the toil is wearying and the harvest thin, when it is all hard ploughing on stony ground and no reaping, when your teachings are refused and your appeals scorned, when your prayers are unanswered and your labours bring no reward—then call to mind that repelled and rejected one who shed so many tears over hardened human hearts, who spent His years in what seemed fruitless labour and heart-wearying failure, and who now lives rejoicing over the result of His long travail, who through all those ages has been winning victory upon victory and gathered millions and millions of hearts around Him in sworn obedience and perfect love. Think of the greatness of the triumph for which He painfully sorrowed and patiently waited, and remember that in His victory every one who has toiled with Him will in due time and measure share. Recover heart again for your work as you bear in mind Him who, after so much of

defeat, has won so many crowns. Bear in remembrance Jesus Christ risen from the dead.

Further, never forget to think of it in your moral struggles. Your endeavours to lift yourselves above the low surroundings of the common world and the weary burden of your own fleshly desires and lusts, when your efforts at self-discipline are frustrated, when you fall or yield in fighting against yourselves, when you are appalled by the difficulties of a straight walk in business, and full of trembling as you ask, Who is sufficient for these things? when your youthful purity is besieged by the evil seductions of pleasure, and middle age is assailed by the temptations of covetousness and ambition, and your heart fails you because of human weakness—remember then that the risen, conquering power of Jesus is most surely in alliance with you, and that He who overcame all the might of evil, all the weight of temptation, is pledged to help you with all His resources. He who gave His life for you is still giving His life and strength to you in every stage of the battle. It is no such unequal conflict as the fearful heart supposes. It is not you against the world, but Christ and you. And victory always inclines to the hands which are held fast in His. Whenever your frail flesh whispers to you, The fight is hard! then bring to your remembrance the image of the risen One.

And think of it especially in all hours when the stress of sorrow, the blinding strokes of bereave-

ment, and the blows of disappointment are upon you. When your purposes are broken off, and life seems to be plunging down into places of darkness, where there is no outlet and no light, where the things you hoped for are scattered in dismay, and the things you prayed and fought against are upon you—remember then, most of all, what the risen One means to you, and what good cheer comes to you in the voices of this Easter day. It is the day which tells us of the greatest of all victories following upon the most crushing of all sorrows, and the most disheartening and paralysing of all disappointments. For if the cross had been the end, if there had been no resurrection following, that cross would have been the saddest, and most humiliating, and most purposeless thing that this world has ever known, and that life of goodness and purity and infinite love would have furnished the most pitiable instance of heart-breaking disappointment and defeat that poor humanity has ever suffered. But that most disastrous failure was but the prelude to the most signal and glorious of all faith's triumphs and love's sweet victories. And so to-day, and every day indeed, we read with a new meaning, because we read in the light of the resurrection, all the sorrowful and disappointing scenes and incidents in the lives of faithful men and women. We are reminded that a glad Easter morning comes after every Gethsemane and Calvary. Christ speaks to every mournful and oppressed heart, telling them how the heaviest sorrow

that the world has known was changed into exulting joy, and bidding them look up, and wait and hope. Remember, my brethren, that there is one with you who has felt all conceivable pangs of frustrated purpose, deferred hope, cruelty of friends, defeated effort, weary delay, heart-rending disappointment, and come through them all to joy and satisfaction. And who is for ever saying to you, bear as I bore, press on as I pressed on, hope as I hoped, win as I have won. Lo, I am with you alway, be of good cheer. Yes, and it will ever put you in good cheer, to bear in remembrance, Jesus Christ risen from the dead.

RISEN WITH CHRIST

(Easter)

"If ye then be risen with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ sitteth on the right hand of God. Set your affection on things above, not on things on the earth."—COL. iii. 1 and 2.

IT is far easier to observe the festival of Easter than to learn the simplest of its spiritual lessons. Far easier to sing Easter songs, than to feel in ourselves the moral and spiritual elevation of which St Paul speaks here. We can believe that our Lord left His grave, broke the bands of death, and reappeared to His disciples clothed with immortal life and beauty. We can readily grasp that great Easter thought. And we can go a step further. We can see in His rising from the dead a prediction and promise of our own. We can understand that His victory over death anticipated ours, and that because He lives we shall live also. And these are sublime facts and truths which can never be over-rated, and which can never be forgotten so long as there is any faith or memory of Christ at all.

But St Paul, while glorying in this aspect of the

resurrection, laid almost greater emphasis upon another which we sometimes overlook. He did not regard it merely or mainly as a victory over death and as a proof of the future life: he thought of it chiefly as a great uprising of moral and spiritual power in which every Christian life participates. If we are in any degree united to Christ by faith, we are in a measure raised with Him. The forces which entered that grave and set Him free and lifted Him up to a mightier life, did not exhaust themselves there. That was only the beginning of them. They are now operating on every one of us. The power which raised Jesus from the dead is continually working to raise us. He Himself is invested with this power since He rose from the dead. Christ risen was not just the same as the Christ who walked with the disciples. He was crucified in weakness and raised in power—power a hundred fold, a thousand fold greater than He had in the days of His flesh. And by virtue of this power He lifts up, according to the measure of their faith, all who cling to Him, believe in Him and love Him. He lifts them above their selves, their bodies, and their earthly drawings. We are raised even as He was raised. This is no mere figure: it is a divine fact on which St Paul incessantly dwells, and on which he bases his appeal here. "If ye then be risen with Christ, seek those things which are above."

1. First, then, we are asked to think of ourselves as a risen people, risen with Christ. In one sense, Christ

elevated the race. The whole human family was set upon a higher level of worth and dignity, when he grappled with man's worst foes and trod them down. He fought that fight against death and the grave, against sin, and the forces of darkness, and the enemies of God, not for Himself only, but for all. He represented humanity. Humanity was crucified and buried with Him, humanity was raised victorious with Him. Our human nature is exalted. The first Easter morning put a halo upon its face. The glory of the Son of God lighted upon it, and the glory has been there ever since. All who know the Lord Jesus know this and feel it. To believe in Christ's Resurrection is to believe in our own promotion and expansion. We are consciously lifted up with Him. A new valuation has been put upon us. We are no longer frail mortals, we are made after the power of an endless life. We are no longer earth-chained creatures toiling slowly to our end in the grave: we are spirits with soaring wings of faith, and faces looking heavenward. No longer is it written of us, dust thou art and into dust shalt thou return. The dust has been changed into imperishable gold. We have shaken ourselves from the dust and put on our beautiful garments. We have been clothed with might, we can look into the face of death without fear, we can set our feet on sin and tread it down; we can do all things through Christ who strengtheneth us. We walk with Christ in heavenly places, we feel our kinship with the spirits of just men made perfect,

we are sons of God, we have been translated into a nobler world and a higher communion—our hopes stretch beyond the bounds of time and space, into an illimitable region of growth and expanding joy. And there is the same power at work in us which gave Christ His purity and sinlessness, His incorruptible life, and His triumph over all humiliating, shameful, depressing, and evil things. His victory and glory are reserved for us. He has made us partakers with Him in all things. We feel this according to the proportion of our faith. Merely to know that Christ rose from the dead gives us a mighty lifting up. To believe that He is alive for evermore holds us up still higher. And to realise that His inexhaustible power is shared out to us is a perpetual inspiration. If we have faith in this as a grain of mustard seed we can almost move mountains. The least bit of it is strengthening and ennobling. A great faith makes us half-divine. In His uprising from the grave we all ascend into higher places. We are risen with Christ.

2. The Apostle reminds us that our thoughts and affections are to be lifted up to the level of this risen life: "Seek those things which are above, where Christ sitteth on the right hand of God, set your affections on things above and not on things on the earth." He does not mean what has been called vulgarly other-worldliness. He does not mean that we are to lift our thoughts away from the earth, from its enjoyments, work, and relationships; not that we

are to occupy ourselves with dreamy musings and imaginations concerning the world beyond, with guesses and conjectures about Heaven's golden streets and crowns, its raptures, visions, and service of joy. There is little good done or gained by that save in the exceptional hours of life when pain, sickness, and solitude are upon us and we are waiting perhaps at the gates of death. What he means is that we should steep our earthly thoughts in a heavenly atmosphere, and paint them with the purer and fairer colours of a heavenly clime. When St Paul speaks of the things above, and the things below, he is not setting in contrast the abode of the blessed and our present dwelling-place. The contrast is rather between the good and the evil, the fleshly and the spiritual. Christ's way of looking at things, and the ordinary earthly way. There is a way of measuring and estimating things as if we were merely human, nay, as if we were just educated animals with bodily affections and feelings, short lived and perishable, like all the material things around us, and there is another way of surveying and judging them, which is the way of elevated, immortal, and spiritual creatures, creatures who are akin to Christ, and look with Christ's eyes. And this higher way is what we are to aspire to. Christ has enthroned certain qualities with himself at the right hand of God. Certain qualities and thoughts, ways of thinking, and ways of judging. He has exalted them with Himself. He has made them supremely beautiful. They are the

divine, all-attractive, all-victorious things, and we are to prize them above all things and to set our affections on them. Think of all things as Christ thinks of them, judge and weigh all things as Christ judges them. Read His meaning unto all things. You are risen with Him : let your thoughts and affections move on His high level. That is what St Paul is advising here ; yes, we are to use the minds and hearts of risen men, in all that we do, see, and strive after. The light of the first blessed Easter morning is to be always shining in our eyes, and in that light, life and death, and all things are to put on a new face. There are two different and opposite ways of looking at all the common things and events of life. The higher and the lower, Christ's way and the short-sighted, coarse, earthly way. Look at death with man's faithless eyes. It is the grim terror, the final enemy, the supreme ugliness, the climax of agony and despair, the huge nightmare, the haunting shadow, the thing which all men flee from and hate. But see it in Christ's light. It is but a transformation scene. A moment's sleep, and a long awaking, an hour's weeping followed by a morning of joy, a mask with a face of eternal beauty behind it, a gateway leading out of mystery into the world of light and visions. Look down, and death is nothing but the cold grave and corruption ; look up, and it is a figure crowned and glorified at the right hand of God. Think of sin and evil and all your moral infirmities, as unbelieving man sees them. They are the inevitable diseases of

humanity, wounds which no physician can heal—ugly scars which neither time nor eternity can remove, burdens which man must carry, curses which are fastened to him for ever. Think of these same things in Christ's light, and they are only the bad dreams of a passing season, stings which His power extracts, ghosts which His word banishes. They were under his feet once—they can be under our feet. We can defy them, and subdue them in His name. Think of gold, pleasures, ambitions, the gains, honours, and glories of the world. See them as the world sees them. They are of huge magnitude; they bstride the universe; they gird the whole horizon; they are of inestimable importance, no scales are big enough to weigh them; they are worthy of martyrdom, to gain them a man will sell his soul. But let Easter light and Easter thoughts fall upon them, and they shrivel up like a gourd; they have no more substance than a shadow. One promise of Christ is worth them all; as a dream when one awaketh, so you despise their image. Take Christ's view of all these things. See them as He sees them in His ascended glory. Think of them as men risen with Him. That is the grand Easter lesson.

And remember that there is a higher and also a lower in all things. Every thought has its earthly side and its heavenly. Every emotion and affection may be coarse and sensual or holy and divine. You may see something of God wherever you look, or you may see nothing but the world, the flesh, and the devil.

In your business you may find nothing but a sphere of competition, a means of making money, a sphere for the display of smartness and selfish agility ; or a place of duty, a place of witness bearing, a place where righteousness is disciplined, and where apprenticeship is done for the higher service. In your children you may see beings whom you are training for the world and its cravings, for suitable marriages and ambitious places, heirs of your name and your savings ; or you may see in them those whose angels do always behold the Father's face, spirits to be shaped into immortal beauty, gifts of God to be consecrated to His service and to be yours and His in deathless affection for ever. In the sorrows and trials and disappointments of life you may feel nothing but the ills to which flesh is heir, the arrows which fly about from the quiver of cruel fate with no God to stop them or care where they fall. You may think of them as the worrying irritations and utterly unreasonable stings, thorns, and crosses, which are sent to vex you and work no good whatever ; or, in the light of the great cross bearer, you may think of them as the medicine of love, as healing stripes, as lessons in God's great school of patience, as crosses with a crown behind them, as darkness which is preparing for the glory of an Easter morning. In these and everything else, there is a looking downward or a pointing upward. In every scene of life, and at every point of life, there are two opposite ways of taking, measuring, and regarding

things. Every spot on earth touches heavenly places or reaches down to the places which are the reverse of heavenly. Everything may have a divine aspect, and everything may be looked at in such a way that it hides the divine and only shows man's animal and selfish face. And what St Paul says to us in these words, and what Christ says to us on this Easter morning, and says to us always indeed, is this : I have ascended here out of your sight and enthroned Myself in the higher places among all the higher thoughts and affections that I might lift your thoughts up. You are risen with Me that you may love what I love and approve what I approve ; that you may see death, sin, sorrow, human strivings, friendships, work, home life, the world around you, and the world beyond, just as they spread themselves out before me and as I see them. I want to fill your lives with great thoughts, with divine and immortal affections, with bright and boundless hopes, that even now you may in a deep, true sense live with me in these heavenly places as men raised and glorified.

That is surely one of the best messages which the day of resurrection brings to us from our Lord—"If ye then be risen with Christ, seek those things which are above."

THE POWER FROM ON HIGH

(Ascension Day)

“Tarry ye in the city of Jerusalem until ye be endued with power from on high.”—LUKE xxiv. 49.

THIS was one of the last words of the risen Christ to His disciples, one of the parting words, if it was not absolutely the last command. When He had said this, He blessed them and vanished out of their sight. And strangely enough this final command was an order to stand still and wait. He had brought them to the verge of their battlefield. He had shown them the conflict which awaited them, and given them their marching and fighting orders. He had trained and drilled them for three years. Their instructions were complete. The preparation was finished. They were in possession of all the truths and facts of which they were to testify. His teachings were engraven on their minds. All the scenes of His life remained as living pictures in their hearts—they had seen Him die, and seen Him triumph over death. They were ready to bear witness both of the cross and the resurrection—their equipment seemed complete, lacking nothing,—nothing at least which human eyes could see or the

human mind judge, and they were impatient to begin. Yet He ordered them to stand still—they were not ready yet. The main thing was wanting. The weapons were there, but not the force which would make them effective. The vessels were ready, but heaven had not yet filled them. The machinery was there, but not the fire to move it, and make it thrill and throb with life. “Tarry ye in the city of Jerusalem until ye be endued with power from on high.”

The tarrying was not long—ten days at most. It came in answer to continued prayer. It came in an hour unlooked for, in a way and manner unexpected. Not one of them could have explained how it came or what it was. Unseen, intangible, undefinable, mysterious, mighty above all thought, inexpressible, unimaginable. They could only call it the power of the Holy Ghost. But the effects of it were grand, immeasurable, creative, and all-transforming. It set everything within them and about them on fire—fire that consumed the littleness, weakness, cowardice, and selfishness that were in them. It flooded their world with heavenly light. It filled their hearts and minds, souls, and all that was within them, with emotions, fervours, and passions, with faith, energy, courage, and devotion, with love, pity, persuasiveness, and convincing utterance. It was everything and all things in the long, victorious warfare which followed—the power from on high.

Now, let me say :—

1. That this is still and always the grand secret of the Christian life, and the one supreme and indispensable fact. In one sense we are saved by faith, but it is because faith brings to our support forces which are more than human. In a deeper sense we are saved by the coming down upon us and within us of the power from on high. There is the one solemn, awful, sublime difference between moral effort and Christian endeavour, between the man who sets himself to live a good life by the energy of his own will and the strength of his own resources, and the man who clings to Almighty God and joins himself by prayer to the helps of the Holy Ghost. The one is playing a game with opponents more astute than himself, and with great odds against him; the other is playing it with a consciousness that if left alone he will fail, but with the equal certainty that he cannot be left alone, that he has unseen auxiliaries mightier than all his antagonists.

In our single Christian life, and in the life and labours of that one great Church of which we form part, everything tarries until it is endued with power from on high. Everything is dependent upon that—human energy, skill, knowledge, wisdom, and eloquence would recoil from the conflict, collapse despairing in the conflict, if they were not sustained by something incomparably greater than themselves. We wrestle against foes more numerous than ourselves, often far cleverer than ourselves. The world's wisdom is more cunning than ours, its knowledge

wider, its contrivances more ingenious, its lusts, passions, greeds, ambitions, and seductions more attractive and more masterful. We are all but helpless in the struggle until we fall back upon the forces which are not our own but by faith become our own; until we feel within us the upliftings of almightiness, and know that God holds the battle in His own hands, while our feeble hands fight it. And continually we are saved from fainting by hearing again the Master's words, "Ye shall receive power after the Holy Ghost is come upon you." Keep this in mind then.

2. That it is the unseen power from on high, and not the visible weapons and machinery, that determines the battle. Little machinery was there in that first company of disciples. They went forth with an outfit so shabby that it would have disgraced the poorest soldiers; of weapons and resources they had none which could be weighed and handled. If they had put all the money they possessed into one box, it would hardly have amounted to the sum which we collect each Lord's Day. They had not a sanctuary, temple, church, or chapel of any sort; they met in the open air or unfurnished attics; there was not one of them who had any worldly influence or position, not one of them possessed the gift of eloquence or stores of learning; not one of them could have passed a theological examination or got a modern bishop to ordain him. They had no patronage from the State or smiles from any great folk; but a world of frowns

and hatreds besetting them. In fact, they had not a single material aid and appliance. They had nothing whatever but the power from on high, and that proved sufficient.

Without that, in fact, all our resources and organisations are so much empty show, waste paper, meaningless trumpet-sounding, or idle beating of the air. To-day the machinery of the Church is stupendous, its wealth enormous, its organisations so many and varied as to baffle tabulation. Its sacred buildings are counted by tens and hundreds of thousands. Its mental gifts are prodigious. Its labours and its literature are a volume broad and deep as a great sea. Yet with all this, we believe in our deepest hearts, that it would be no better than a stagnant marsh, no better than heaps of fallen leaves in autumn, without the power from on high to keep it in healthy action, to save it from corruption or the sleep of death.

What utter faithlessness there is in the thought that the existence and vitality of the Church depend upon wealth and endowments, upon State patronage, parliamentary support, alliance of kings, favour of rulers, smiles of great folk, and that the Church would fall to pieces if these golden bands were broken. It is a lie against the Holy Ghost to say that religion in this or any other land is buttressed by these supports, and hangs upon these secular chains. Men trust in these things because they have no real trust in the power from on high. It

is not costly machinery that saves men, but the spiritual forces that come without money and without price. Poverty in rags may be as much a temple of the Holy Ghost as the mitred splendour of an archbishop.

And if you say, No! it is not material grandeur that the Church needs, but mental gifts; if you say we want eloquence, persuasive power, genius, scholarship, elocution, attractive and charming orators in the pulpit—I answer in the same words: These are dead and idle instruments in themselves; sounding brass and tinkling cymbals by themselves. Oratory never converted a soul, or aroused one dead heart to aspire after the things of God. The weapons of our warfare are not mental endowments any more than they are material riches. It is the power from on high that steeps words with convincing energy, and recreates and sanctifies. Do you think that because you have some beautiful building with all its comforts and attractions, and wealth enough to carry on all the work, and music which appeals to refined ears, and preaching which perhaps attracts the curious, and supplies the critic with an object, and wins now and then a word of praise—do you think because of these things you are going to do God's work triumphantly? If you do, the Lord forgive you and prepare you for a bitter disappointment. It will all be utterly in vain unless there come into your assemblies and all your organisations, into pulpit and pew, quickening all hearts and firing them all, what

Jesus called the power from on high. It is not by might or machinery, but by My spirit, saith the Lord. Keep this in mind.

3. That the power from on high comes down upon men and not upon things. It enters hearts and not walls, living souls and not bricks and marble. It consecrates wills and affections and not places, buildings, and graveyards. It glorifies souls and not clothes, symbols, crosses, crucifixes, and altars. It imparts grace, strength, virtue to praying, believing hearts and minds, and not to sacraments and sacramental implements. Every saint is full of it, but there is not a particle of it in the robes and relics and bones which the saint has left. It is not a thing conveyed by human hands from one to another. There is none of it in hands or human channels. Every holy man of God has it, but he got it not from the hands which were laid upon his head. It came to him straight from God. The supernatural is not in things, and elements, and signs, and machinery: it is in souls. There are no holy things; there are only holy men and women. It is mere paganism to suppose that you give virtue, or give anything at all, to the soil of a cemetery or the stones of a church by a consecrating act. The Holy Ghost does not join Himself to dead matter. He breathes Himself only into hearts of faith and love. There is no worse idolatry than that which bows before altars, candles, images, relics, wafers, bread, wine, water, incense pans, and all the other furniture of superstition, as if God's healing were

in them, as if some invisible, heavenly grace were enshrined there. Men are talking to us again in this Protestant land about holy water, and holy incense, and holy crosses, and holy robes. Forgive me for saying that it is holy foolery and nothing else. We invest these things with a fictitious holiness, that they may be a substitute for the real thing; just to save ourselves the trouble of being holy ourselves. If you can be born again and renewed by the sprinkling of a few drops of water, how convenient it is! If you can win Christ's merits by kissing a wooden cross, and get cleansing from sin by adoring the uplifted elements, how cheap and easy the thing is! If you can have Christ within you by eating the bread which the priest has changed into His body, how sweetly simple and mechanical that business! The Archbishop of Canterbury learnedly discourses on the difference between consubstantiation and transubstantiation, and learnedly concludes that in a Protestant church the former may be believed. To me they are equally offensive, equally untrue, equally superstitious, and even degrading. That Christ is in the bread and wine in any way is a revolting thought. That you take Him in through the mouth and digestive organs is gross materialism. That you can eat Him as you eat other food is disgusting. It is the believing, loving heart that takes Him in. The real presence is not in anything you see, feel, taste, and handle, but in the faith that believes in Him, the nature that yields to Him, the souls that love Him.

Consecrated things! Holy things! No. The power is not wasted on them. The Holy Ghost does not glorify and manifest Himself in chalices, and wood, and unleavened or leavened bread, and grape juice; but in the souls whom He fills with energy, virtue, sweet emotions, and sanctities. I say the power from above does not come down upon things, but men. It makes new men—large, generous-hearted men, men of prayer and all-round goodness, loving, unselfish men, earnest, faithful, hopeful, and joyous men, as it made the disciples. Tarry in Jerusalem until *ye*—not your robes, staves, and machinery, but *ye*—are endued with power from on high. Brethren, how does it come? What is this Holy Ghost power? Who can understand the mystery of it? I say at once, no man! God gives the power without explaining it. The men who have been most determined to expound and define the nature and attributes and doctrine of the Holy Ghost, and unfold it in elaborate phraseology in the creeds, have generally been the men who knew least about it by blessed uplifting experience. If to understand it were a condition of possessing and enjoying it, we might well despair. Like the love of God in Christ, it passeth knowledge, and soars above our comprehension. But the power is given to all who long and pray for it. Have we not the Master's words: If ye then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, will not God give His holy spirit to them that ask Him. It comes to your own hearts and lives if you pray for

it often and earnestly. It comes to a Church if there is much supplication for it. It comes you know not how ; but you see and know the fruits. Unity comes with it, blessed peace, earnest labour, passion for souls, fervour, strength, and conversions in a Church, and in your own hearts patience, long-suffering, gentleness, great peace and joy in believing. Every one knows when the tarrying is over, and when he and those about him are endued with power from on high.

THE PRESENCE THAT NEVER FAILETH

(*Whitsunday*)

"And lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world."—MATT. xxviii. 20.

IT was the last promise that He gave to His disciples. He gave it just before the moment when He was lifted out of their sight, just before His bodily form and visible presence was removed from the world's eyes, at least, until He come again. It was absolutely the last word that He spoke on earth. And we may almost say that it was His greatest word, His most precious word. He kept the best word for the last. Certainly to that little band of disciples it must have been the climax, the culmination, the grand amen of all His strengthening and inspiring utterances. For it promised them what they needed most, what was indispensable indeed, their Master's continued presence, His directing wisdom, His restraining and energising power, His supernatural support. They feared they were losing Him altogether, and it was like the darkening of the sky. It sent a chill blast of doubt through their hearts. He had become all the

world to them, their strength and joy and mighty hope, their rock and refuge, their shadow of protection, their one clear light. And they trembled as they thought of what would happen when His face was seen no more, when they were left alone to face the world which had crucified Him, and to fight their battle without Him to lead. Surely their hearts would lose all courage and hopefulness, and their work fail through their human fickleness and feebleness. Such were the misgivings which our Lord answered in this farewell promise. It was an assurance that they would still and for ever feel His hand laid upon their spirits, and hear His secret voice speaking to them amid the din of the conflict; that they would be still wrapped round by His unseen protection, and be conscious of His companionship; that, in fact, He would be more constantly with them and nearer to them than He had been in the days of His flesh. "Lo, I am with you alway, even to the end of the world." So much for the little company who first heard the words. And now we read them as the Saviour's legacy to the Church. For these words are unlimited in their application. The very form of them suggests universality. They are not in the future tense; they comprehend all times in one eternal now; they gather up all the ages, and they run through all the world; they are a promise which is being perpetually fulfilled; an inexhaustible storehouse of inspiration; they are the unchanging watchword of the Christian army, the secret of its

power, the foundation of all its confidence, the source of all its victories. Lo, I am with you alway, even to the end of the ages, even to the final consummation, when His purpose will be completed and the work of the Church done.

1. This is substantially the truth which is brought before our minds to-day, the truth which Whitsuntide recalls and emphasises. We think of this day in various aspects, as the anniversary of Pentecost, as the day of the Holy Ghost, as the day when human hearts were endued with the power from on high, and the Church equipped for its work and warfare ; as the day when extraordinary gifts were bestowed on men, and souls were fired and encouraged with new thoughts and emotions, and when manifold conversions were wrought. But the one divine fact which underlies all the rest is this : that Christ on that day began to fulfil and prove His last promise. All that they saw and felt on that day and every day afterwards were manifestations of His presence. He *had come* again ; He was in their midst ; His spirit was in contact with theirs ; His power rested upon them ; He swayed them, in fact, more mightily than ever He had done during His life. Aforetime He had been outside their lives, a face to behold, a voice to hear, a master to follow. Now He was even nearer, He was within them ; they were the temple in which He dwelt ; He had become a part of their very nature, and in all they said and did they felt the movements of His spirit, and laboured and suffered

with a power greater and diviner than their own. He was with them ; He was in them, and they were new men, recreated men, with little resemblance to their old selves. Their original weakness, fickleness, and cowardice had disappeared ; they were heroes in courage, giants in moral strength and endurance, prophets in fervour and boldness, saints in patience, Christlike in love, pity, and sympathy. He had wrought his greatest miracles on them. He had simply filled them with Himself. He had showed in them, first, the meaning of this promise and how it would be fulfilled in every age. Lo, I am with you always—that, my brethren, is the divine, the everlasting fact which we celebrate to-day.

2. This is the greatest of Christian facts. It is the truth which gives our faith all its substance and certainty and which inspires the believing heart with all its confidence and hopefulness. That which makes the Christian life is an undoubting belief in a present living mightily working Christ. It is not what some have, a reverence and admiration for Christ as the great historical figure of the past. It is a profound and joyful recognition of His never-ceasing action upon human hearts and lives now. It is not the acceptance of His teachings as wise and gracious words once uttered and left to work their way by virtue of their own beauty and power ; it is a belief that He who gave them is always enforcing them, and making it possible to obey them by the mighty and all-subduing action of His spirit. It is not even

the acknowledgment of His dying, sacrificial, atoning death that makes the Christian, but the blessed, sustaining assurance that His risen power is perpetually applied to strengthen the human heart in its moral endeavours, and give it victory over sin. There are people who ignorantly say that Christ finished His work on Calvary. They say it was all done then and man's salvation wrought. They do not think what they are saying, and they do not mean it. Every earnest Christian rejoices to think rather that that was only the beginning of His work, and that the greater part of it is that which came after and is going on now. The Christian life draws its main sustenance from this fact, that the Almighty Saviour is in living, active communion with all who love Him, to arm them for the fight, to strengthen all that is feeble and failing, to cheer them when they droop and despond, to brace their energies, confirm their faith, and disperse their fears and doubts; that He is ever marching unseen at the head of His host and hidden in the secret heart of each soldier, ever in the thick of the conflict, pitying, helping, shielding, raising the wounded, comforting the dying, infusing patience into the weary and courage into the strong. His ministry was not for three years, but for all the ages. Lo, I am with you alway, even to the end of the world.

3. His unseen presence and power make the perpetual miracle of Church history and Christian life. It is a strange thing that since He vanished

from the view of the disciples He has never been seen again by mortal eyes, never again, save by one man—Paul. Mystic monks and dreamers have, indeed, reported that He appeared to them. And possibly they were not all mistaken. It may have been so. But certainly, from the eyes of the Church and the world, He has hidden Himself all these long centuries. It is indeed a strange thing that He has given no visible, tangible sign of His presence to the Church which He so dearly loves, and the world which He came to save; and thousands and thousands of people on that account have refused to believe that He is alive at all. But there is a far stranger thing than that. Yes, it is an infinitely more wonderful thing that He has done all His most wonderful works among men since His visible presence was taken away, and without shewing Himself at all. Millions of men and women in every period of Christian history, have been more moved and inspired by the unseen Christ than the most devoted of His disciples were moved and inspired by the sight of His bodily form. His spiritual presence did even for them what the human intercourse had failed to effect. By His earthly ministry, He did not make one man brave enough to cling to Him at the last extremity, not one devoted enough to stand by His side before Pilate, and share the shame of His cross. But His invisible presence has inspired, and made martyrs, and confessors, more than can be numbered. There has never been a century since,

which has not produced hundreds, thousands of these, men, women, youths, virgins, even children who were willing to count all things as loss for His sake, and lay down their very lives at His call. And to-day it is the same, though men suffer and die for Him in other ways. It is nearly two thousand years since that lovely vision passed over Palestine, and the voice was heard which spake as never man spake. All that time He has remained unseen. He has spoken not, yet His force is not spent. It is unabated. It is mightier than ever. The love which binds men to Him is as intense as ever, and more widespread. His name is sweeter to millions of men than all the music which human ears have heard, and the inspiration, and help, and strengthenings which come from Him, are as soothing, and energising, and recreating, and as manifold as ever. He is to the moral world what the vital forces are in the natural world. No one can see those vital forces or explain how they work. We can only see the results. They clothe the landscapes with verdure, they cover the hedges with blossoms, they change ugliness into beauty, and waste places into gardens of delight. And thus the unseen Christ works in the moral world. Everywhere moral life springs into beauty where His invisible hand has been. In every sphere of human life and work, there are devoted and heroic spirits, doing brave and lovely deeds, and living self-forgetting lives for His name-sake. In thousands and thousands of young lives,

He is the source of all energy, and the ideal of all beauty. Innumerable people of middle age bear all their burdens in His strength, and the old and weary are made hopeful again by the very echo of His words. In sick-chambers, in the house of mourning, and by the graveside, in bereaved hearts, and broken lives, He is the one restorer and comforter, and sorrow and mourning flee away as His name is spoken; and all that is most beautiful in human life; all that makes the story of humanity best worth reading; all that does most to mitigate the world's pains, and lighten its darkness, and cheer it with hope, are produced by the faith which He inspires. Ah, this is wonderful indeed. This is the miracle which supersedes all others, and proves that He is indeed alive. "For who can believe that the charm of a dead man's name, the memory of a life that was once lived, the influence of words dropped two thousand years ago would do this." No, that were impossible! Memories are not so almighty; words are not so eternally vital. It is because He is for ever passing by; laying His hand everywhere; creating divine thoughts; breathing divine inspirations; infusing divine strength everywhere. It is because these words are true: Lo, I am with you always, to the end of the world.

4. We are to lay this thought to heart in all our Church work, in all our labours for men, and in all the discipline and endeavours of private life. It is to be the clear shining light in all dark places, the

song sung to us afresh in every desponding mood, the final answer to every complaining note, every cry of discouragement, every sigh of failure, and every voice of fear. Lo, I am with you alway, is the password for every night, the word of greeting for each opening day. We hear it when we put our hands to the plough in the morning, and all through the day, and when the dark comes on and we can toil no more. It is the word which dissipates all alarms and bids us be of good cheer through clouds or sunlight. He is always with us in the days when the Church stands still and when it moves on. He is always there to infuse into the hearts of the faithful His own unquenchable courage and eternal hope. He is always with us in our personal endeavouring when we are drawn by evil, and when we are striving after good; when our hearts are oppressed by sorrows, and when life is all sunshine; all through life's changes, and in the last dark hour He is with us.

O thanks be unto God for His unspeakable gift; for the Christ who once gave Himself to men, and gives Himself again every day to them that love Him. We are not alone; His saving arms are all about us; His presence breathes perpetual rest and consecration.

Lo, I am with you alway.

THE PREPARATION FOR POWER

(*Whitsuntide*)

“And when the day of Pentecost was fully come, they were all with one accord in one place.”—ACTS ii. 1.

HOLIDAY and holy day used to be the same word, and meant the same thing. That is not always true now. Our holidays are seasons of rest, recreation, and enjoyment, and sometimes their sacred significance is left out. But there is no reason why we should not observe them in both these aspects. This day certainly ought to be for every Christian a holy day. It is in some respects the most beautiful of our Christian anniversaries. Christmas and Easter are perhaps made more of, but that is because they are better understood, and appeal more to the popular mind, and not because the facts which they bring into prominence are of greater importance.

This is not Christ's birthday, but it is the birthday of the Church. It celebrates a new spiritual creation. It carries us back to the beginnings of that wonderful society, that divine institution, which has existed and increased in power all these centuries, which has

carried the name and power of Christ into all parts of the earth, and which will continue to bear its witness to the end of the ages. The Church sprang into being on this day. Our Lord commenced His unseen ministry, and began to reap the harvest He had sown in tears, agony, and death. It must be, therefore, a day of high solemnity and inspiring memories to all who call Him Lord.

In the age of the Apostles, and long afterwards, it was called, as it is in our text, pentecostal day. Then gradually it got that name which is now popularly given to it, Whit Sunday, or White Sunday. The change came about, as such changes do, by a simple process. It was the day when candidates for the ministry were generally ordained and new converts generally baptised, and they all wore white robes on the solemn occasion—white robes to denote that they were henceforth to be clothed inwardly with grace and purity, and that they were spiritually renewed and transformed by the Holy Ghost. Hence White Sunday! That may be only a curiosity of Church history, but it grew out of a true appreciation of the pentecostal fact.

That day long ago was White Sunday in a deeper sense. Those first disciples were invested with real garments of holiness, clothed spiritually with robes of light. They passed into a new life, they were transfigured by a miraculous change in the inner man, and received power to become sons of God. Most of the old self passed away, with its fickleness,

timidity, small views, cramping prejudices, and dullness of vision. It was replaced with a larger other self, strong, brave, fearless, tender, sympathetic, enlightened, and Christlike, endowed with breadth of view, elevation of purpose, and intensity of zeal and love. It was a transformation, wonderful and complete, the like of which had never been seen before, transcending human experiences, contrary to natural law, unaccountable save by the explanation which is given here: that there came down upon them a power from on high, and they were all filled with the Holy Ghost.

But remember that to-day we do not simply commemorate that great historical incident. We remind ourselves that the power which changed these men is ceaselessly at work. It has never been withdrawn from the Church; it is the source of all its fervour; it is the very soul of all its activities, and the breath divine which keeps it alive. The Church with all its creeds, confessions, wealth, organisations, buildings, preachers, and choirs would be little more than a heap of rusty useless machinery, or even a showy corpse without these. It is the spirit within the wheels, and the furnace, which keep the whole mass throbbing with life and action. There are times, indeed, when we do not realise the power, times when we hardly believe in it; but it is always waiting upon us, waiting to descend again. The Holy Ghost is always hovering over the *heads* of believers, if they do not hold Him in their hearts.

A new day of Pentecost is within reach of every Christian church and congregation. They can command it, if they ask for it and prepare for it in the right way. And the story which we read to-day shows us how it came to those men of old, and how it still comes to Christ's people.

1. We are told of the preparation for Pentecost. If we read merely the account given in this chapter we might suppose that the coming of the Holy Ghost was the work of a day, of an hour, almost of a moment. Suddenly there came a sound from heaven as of a mighty rushing wind, and there appeared unto them cloven tongues as of fire, and they were all filled with the Holy Ghost. Quickly as a flash of lightning it came, breaking out of the clouds or the clear sky without warning, and causing the very heavens, as it were, to descend in copious showers of blessing. But that was only the climax, the final outcome of a long series of events. "When the day of Pentecost was *fully* come," we read, when everything had made ready for it, then it came swiftly as the light. It came like the electric current which falls upon explosive material, or a great mass of dry tinder prepared for kindling. The storm bursts in a moment, but it has taken days for the storm clouds to gather. A revolution is the work of a day, but the causes which led up to it have been going on for years. There had been a long preparation for that pentecostal revival. The seed had been growing many days underground in the darkness before it sprang

up to the light. All the teachings, doings, sufferings, and personal influence of Jesus had been leading up to this. His thoughts had sunk deep in the hearts of these men. His cross and resurrection had filled them with wonder and awe. His exceeding loveliness had charmed and enthralled them. His promises had excited them with great expectations. Nothing which He had done and said had been lost upon them. Everything was ready for the kindling. For many days they were in an attitude of strained anticipation. And at length there was the sound from heaven, and the tongues of fire appeared.

We often speak of revivals, conversions, moral renewals and spiritual upliftings as coming suddenly. We speak ignorantly. It is because the antecedents have been hidden from us and only the result appears. In fact, God rarely or never works suddenly. He spends long time in laying the material before He sends the spark. Two hundred years had been preparing for the Reformation before Luther nailed the pope's bull to the door of Wittenburg Church. A man is sometimes converted in an hour, but manifold influences have been at work for days and months to prepare him for that hour. A thousand seeds have fallen into apparently unproductive soil. There have been teachings, examples, warnings, workings of conscience, strivings of God's spirit, getting him ready for the final touch. The decisive moment only gathers up and consummates the work of years. A single sermon is wonderfully blessed to you. It gives a

new direction to your lives, but the mental mood in you which gives that sermon its power has been slowly wrought by all manner of agencies with which the preacher had nothing to do. The fuel must be ignitable, or the spark falls in vain. In vain does the spirit of God brood over hearts and minds full of paltry cares, ambitions, and envies, full of coarse, sordid, selfish schemes and desires. There will be no blessing in the most exalted, religious service if there has not been some prayerful preparation for it.

There is no day of Pentecost without the things that lead up to it. When a wave of revival sweeps over a religious community, it appears to begin suddenly. No one can account for its beginning. It is as if an angel had come down without warning to stir the Bethesda pool. But, in fact, numerous instrumentalities have been silently working to produce it. It is the harvest of seed dropped in Sunday school, Mission room, Christian endeavour, prayer meeting, minister's study, people's homes. It is the answer to innumerable supplications offered in sanctuary, at the family altar, and perhaps in the sick chamber. God's spiritual miracles have a long train of spiritual causes behind them. Labours, prayers, seed-sowing, earnest expectation, precede them. Be sure that nothing is lost of all that you do to win a child or adult person to a religious life, or to produce greater zeal and devotion in the life of a church. The spirit of God makes use of it all to prepare for that hour when it shall be said the day

of Pentecost is fully come and the power from on high descends.

2. We are told of two things especially which had immediately preceded and prepared for that great manifestation of spiritual power. First, there was eager expectancy and intense desire. They were all waiting, looking for, fervently longing, and devoutly believing in some unusual spiritual quickening, some flooding of their dry and thirsty hearts with a volume of rich new life. Again and again we read that the disciples and all associated with them were almost continually together, praising, supplicating, and lifting up their hearts to receive the promised gift. It had been promised by lips that could not deceive. They were sure it would not fail. They watched for it as they that watch for the morning. In fact, the Holy Ghost came upon men and women who were literally aflame with an impassioned desire to gain some greater moral and spiritual force than they had yet known. They felt that something was wanting. They were Christians, unquestioning believers. They knew Christ, and loved and adored Him. But they were conscious of a great deficiency: they wanted power, something that would lift them out of their poor, weak selves, something that would intensify their love, and fill them with strength, peace, and joy. And because they felt the need of it and longed for it, it was given.

That attitude always secures some measure of pentecostal blessing. God grants men what they

most earnestly desire. When we feel that our Christian lives, in spite of our correct beliefs, sanctuary gatherings, songs and prayers, are cold, hungry, weak, and ineffective, lacking in true fervour and force; when we say to ourselves this is not the Christian life at all, it is only the form and shell of it; when we begin to cry out for the real power which will lift us out of all this into higher places—then there is a pentecost for us close at hand.

And further, we are told that they were prepared for this great outpouring by the accord which prevailed among them. There was unity of purpose and soul. They were all with one accord in one place—a hundred and twenty men and women with a single heart, asking the same thing, swayed by the same thoughts. That company was as diverse in its composition as any congregation could be. There were nearly all the sects, classes, and divisions of the modern Christian world represented on a small stage. There were wealthy women and poor fishermen, business men and townsmen like Matthew, villagers and country people like the Galilean peasants. There were one or two learned men, perhaps, and a great many unlettered, bold, impulsive natures like Peter, timid and retiring natures like Andrew. There were sanguine optimists like John, doubters and pessimists like Philip and Thomas. There were men of no speech and men of eloquence, men of thought and men of action, near kinsmen of Jesus who might have claimed the lead on that account, others who

had been disciples from the first, with the right of priority. There was every conceivable variety. If they had begun to air these differences and debate these matters, what a bedlam might have resulted. But they were of one accord.

It was a grand federation of free churchmen, a prophetic picture. We read often before time of their disputes, rivalries, and strife for pre-eminence. But all that now had been buried in the grave of their Lord. The fire of His love had consumed it. Their expectations pushed it all away. Every selfish and carnal voice sank into silence as they listened for the voice divine. Then suddenly there was the sound from heaven.

And that, my brethren, may be still, and is, in fact, an indispensable preparation for spiritual power. We need to be so earnest about the higher life, so intent on the realisation of divine gifts, as to forget and put away everything that divides—every class prejudice, every thought of pride. We need to join hands and hearts in a real communion of faith, hope, joy, brotherhood, and devotion to Christ. We need to feel a wave of sympathetic oneness sweeping over all, as the sunlight kisses all the flowers at once, or as a summer breeze stirs a rustling in all the trees together. We want to feel that we are just one in Christ and in our need of Him. Then Pentecost is at the door. Then there may be for all of us a real White Sunday.

A PICTURE OF A JEWISH HOME

(Sunday School Anniversary)

“And ye shall teach them, your children, speaking of them when thou sittest in thine house, and when thou walkest by the way, and when thou liest down, and when thou risest up. And thou shalt write them upon the doorposts of thine house, and upon thy gates.”—DEUT. xi. 19-20.

WE give this day to the children. It is their religious gala day, when they appear before the Lord in festive garments and make a brave show in the eyes of the Lord's people. To-day the sanctuary belongs to them and the service. They take the parts of the ordinary performers and make a very welcome substitute for once. The choristers give place to juvenile and infant voices. The preacher might almost as well retire, for you do not come to hear sermons to-day, but to look on young life and hear its songs. To-day the children are our priests and teachers helping us to pray, and revealing to us some of the secrets which God tells to a child and hides from the older people. And yet as we see them gathered here, we are reminded of our own duties as parents and teachers. We think of their coming years and

the part we shall have in shaping them, and the occasion lends itself to a simple discourse on those lines, which is the only thing that I shall attempt to give you.

The words which I have read to you are a picture of home life in the old Jewish land. At least they are a picture of what that home life was intended to be, and in the best homes really was. And I fancy you will agree with me that it is a picture worth looking at yet, though it must be a few thousand years old. It would not be amiss to take it round and show it in all the towns and villages, and fix a copy of it up in every cottage and villa. I am not sure that it would be wise or praiseworthy to carry out its injunctions literally in every part. The religious Jew did actually adorn his doorposts and gates with Scripture texts. He had them engraved on his ornaments and sometimes pinned them on his clothes. It became in him that Pharisaical display of holiness which our Lord condemned. It would hardly suit our modern taste to make a show of that kind, though it does me good in some houses to see a few dear old Bible words hanging in modest frames on the walls. They often serve a better purpose than the most ambitious paintings. But that is not a feature on which we need dwell. It is enough if we seize the main thought in this domestic scene. We see :

1. That it makes each home a religious school, and entrusts to parents the godly training of

their children. The father was to be priest and prophet in his own household. The mother was to be an active partner with him in those sacred functions. And both were to regard themselves as apostles and witnesses of God to their own sons and daughters. Morning and evening the lamp of instruction was to be lighted, and, indeed, kept burning all the day. The words and works of God were to supply the favourite topic of conversation when they gathered round the hearth or walked in the fields. The child's nursery tales were to be drawn from the stories of Egypt, the Exodus, and the wilderness. The aspirations of young men and the dreams of maidens were to be shaped at this fountain of truth and light, and every available opportunity was to be used for impressing on the growing minds thoughts of reverence, sacred memories, and religious hopes. How far this ideal was realised in the actual life of Israel we know not ; but there was an attempt to realise it, and from that came all that was noble and glorious in the history of the nation. The fires of patriotism, the perpetuation and tenacity of its religious life, the long succession of heroic sons and daughters, brave soldiers, wise kings, inspired psalmists, and prophets. In fact, the main secret of the nation's singular power and influence was told in our text. The religious life of the home was the nursery of its genius, valour, and greatness.

Now, of course, in those rude and remote times the training of the young depended on the parents more

than it does to-day. Schools were few. Sanctuaries, synagogues, and prophets were wide apart, and often not to be found. Professional teachers were scarce. There were priests in plenty, but the priest has never been a religious schoolmaster. The child was either taught at home or left untaught. All that he knew of history, politics, morals, and religion was gathered on the hearth. His parents were charged with the moulding of his thought and character, and they could not very well transfer the burden to other shoulders. We have changed all that by the division of functions and labours which civilisation has brought. It is an age of schools and schoolmasters, of voluntary teachers and rate-paid teachers, and for prescribed fees or almost without fees we can have our children instructed in all things human and divine, and can give ourselves up with an easy conscience to other matters. Indeed, what with secular schools and Sunday schools, and teachers and preachers and religious literature of all kinds, it might appear that all the provision for home teaching which the old Jewish lawgivers made has become quite antiquated and useless. There are so many hands ready to relieve us of the duty, and to discharge it more efficiently, that it would be superfluous folly to undertake it ourselves; perhaps so, but only if we are content that the best part of it should be left undone. Our text embodies one of those eternal principles which abide unchanged. There are certain duties which can never be performed by deputy. Religious

parents are as much bound to give their children religious food as to provide them with other necessities, and the best food can only be supplied by their own hands. Schoolmasters can write God's law on the young mind, but it is only mothers that can write it on the tender, feeling heart, where it will abide. The fear of God and the sweet love of Jesus are not often given in schools. They come to us through the life of those we love best. The moral quality of the children whom we send out into the world depends mainly upon the home training. The intellectual equipment may be given elsewhere, but the soul-shaping is done there. It is only when the home is made a distinctly Christian school, with the Bible often opened and prayer often heard, and stories of the better life often repeated, that there grows up a generation of sober, god-fearing, duty-loving men. To make *them* it is not enough that the lamp of religion should be lighted at long intervals, or should shine only at the weekly gathering in the sanctuary; it must be kept burning continually like those lights in the old temples which were never allowed to go out. And the only priests who can feed and trim that lamp are the heads of the household. We may well thank God for all willing outsiders who help us with the children, but no one else can be to them, religiously, what we ought to be. The religious part of the teaching given in the best of private or public schools is little more than a scanty acknowledgment that the thing ought not to be

entirely omitted. It is crowded into an obscure corner by the multiplicity of secular things. It is like a hurried grace said before the meal with the thoughts intent on the meal. And what can the Sunday school do with its one hour in the week? its one hour of song and prayer and reading of the dear old stories! It is all that many of the children get of heavenly atmosphere and divine shaping. Thank God for this much, and the brave and patient workers who supply it. But what can that one hour do to counteract all the other influences which tend to choke the good seed? After all, there is no religious school so well equipped as a truly Christian home. There is no priest or prophet so mighty with his children as a godly, praying father. There is no teacher so efficient and persuasive in the higher things as a kindly, winsome, Christian mother, and the ancient obligation is still as much in force as ever. Ye shall teach them, your children. Ye shall make your own homes the school of God and the lamp which shews His light.

2. Our text insists upon much and manifold and oft-repeated teaching of the holy things. The truths are to be spoken at all seasons and in all manner of times and places. When thou sittest in thine house, and when thou walkest by the way, and when thou liest down, and when thou risest up. Around the dinner table and by the fireside, in the hour of evening prayer and in the morning before the work of the day begins, and even as you take your country

walk. In fact, you are to drop into this sacred talk naturally on all sorts of occasions, as if you liked it, and as if there was nothing else that interested you so much. Of course, you will say that is a beautiful dream, but not practicable, not even possible, in this busy age, when there are so many other things to do and talk about. And I admit that it would not be easy to obey this order in the very letter of it, and it would be quite impossible unless we are so profoundly religious as to find such talk a real joy. But in most of our homes it would be a distinct gain if the ordinary conversation were just sprinkled or salted a little with thoughts and words that touch the higher life. It might make the talk a little less frivolous, a little less inane. It might lift it occasionally above the world of the newspaper, business, fashion, sport, and scandal. It might really be more profitable at times to talk about God and the Bible and its noble lives, than to talk about the misdoings of our neighbours and the infirmities of our friends. There is nothing which needs more redeeming and elevating, than the conversation which goes on in an average home. The text is worth thinking of in this connection. But the main idea is that the religious truths should never be long out of sight or out of hearing. The wise lawgiver who wrote this understood the child's nature and needs. There was to be line upon line and precept upon precept, and unwearying patience in teaching, reminding, and reiterating of divine

things. For children learn slowly and forget quickly. At least, however smart they are at learning, they are a great deal more apt to forget. Their clay-like, plastic nature is easily shaped, and still more easily changes its shape. It is moulded afresh ten or twenty times a day. Every touch, every word, every breath that passes over it leaves a tiny impression which is soon obliterated unless it is soon repeated: the good mood comes and passes away. An angel stirs the pool, and then something which is not quite angelic. Holy truths are listened to and perhaps loved, and the next minute something more attractive takes their place. A hundred other sights and sounds and words and influences are working side by side with the religious teacher, working against him probably and making his words void. And so nothing will serve to win and bind the child to the love of goodness and the love of God but incessant repetitions, pleadings and patience, appeals and prayers, examples and teachings for ever renewed. In season and out of season, beginning and continuing ever the self-same thing. It is not the work of a day, nor a year, but of the purpose that never faints and the prayer that never grows slack if we would make our children such men and women as Christ would have them be. Thou shalt teach these things continually. And better still if as God shall help us we can hold these things up in our own lives. For it is the general atmosphere of the home that does more than the occasional talk.

It is the Christian temper and tone which prevail there. It is the quality of our own thoughts. We can never lift others up to a higher level than that on which we habitually walk ourselves. We may point our children fifty times a week to some serene, blessed, Christlike height, but we shall never make them aspire to that height and set their feet towards it, unless they see us up there frequently. Children are not converted by wise words, but by sweet examples. They do not go where sign-posts point, but where those they love best lead. And the surest way of bringing our children near to God is to live near to Him ourselves.

And so we say to-day once more: May the Lord bless them and cause His face to shine upon them, and answer our best prayers for them, and help us each and all to be guiding lights for them in the way everlasting.

ON KEEPING YOUNG AND GETTING OLD

(Sunday School Anniversary)

“There shall be no more thence ; an infant of days, nor an old man that hath not filled his days : for the child shall die an hundred years old, but the sinner being an hundred years old shall be accursed.”—ISAIAH lxv. 20.

THESE old prophets were great dreamers, and they dreamt some dreams which it is not easy for us to understand. This is one of them. You know they did not write in plain English as some of us wish they had done. They used a language which we do not know, and which is sometimes very difficult to translate. It is certainly not easy to get at the writer's meaning here. On the face of it he seems to be predicting a time when nobody will die young, when no child will be carried to the grave, and there will be no mothers crying and breaking their hearts over their dead little ones—a time when every man, whether he be a good man or one of the other sort, shall live out his allotted span, and even beyond it. When each human life shall reach, at least, a century ; that seems to be the meaning on the surface. But surely he must have had some deeper and

better thought. I must confess that a prediction of that kind would have no great charm for me. I should be glad if we could diminish the infant mortality bill. I should be thankful if we had not to dig so many little graves. We should like to see all our children ripening into the full flower and fruit of noble manhood, though it is far better for a child to die and pass into God's hands, than to grow up ill-used and ill-taught to a life of wretchedness and sin. And as for living a hundred years, and keeping everybody else alive for that length of time; it is a thing which I should not pray for. I fancy that we shall have had quite enough of this world, and most people will have had quite enough of us before we reach that particular age, and certainly if we are Christians, we shall want, ere that time comes, to depart and be with Christ, which is far better.

But now I think we can read another meaning in these words which is more to our liking, which has far more wisdom in it, and which is a great deal more likely to come true. Nay, it does come true and is true in a measure in the experience of every one now. You cannot quite see how a child can die a hundred years old. No, but it is possible for a man with a great weight of years to live and die just as hopefully and happily as a child lives. It is possible to have a very old body and a very young heart; and it is just as possible to be only thirty or forty years old, and yet to be as weary, and sad, and

heavy-hearted, and gloomy-hearted, as if you were tottering down to the grave with a hundred winters on your shoulders. Yes, I fancy that was what the prophet wished to teach, that, however old you are, it is possible with the help of God to keep some of the thoughts and feelings of a child; and it is just as possible if you walk in evil ways to be exceedingly old and stale before you have reached middle age.

Most of us wish we were younger, all of us perhaps, except these dear children who stupidly think they will be a great deal happier when they get older. They have not tried it, and therefore do not know. They would like to push the years on, but we should like to push them back if it were possible; for we believe what Wordsworth wrote, that heaven lies about us in our infancy, and that when we leave childhood we are turned out of paradise, and see it no more until we reach the better paradise beyond. A sweet song which I heard long ago from my mother's lips still rings in my ears. It said, Make me a child again just for to-night. A good many of you would utter that prayer if it were of any use, and it is just the sort of wish which comes over you at the children's anniversary. For these young faces and hearts are so full of glad content, that we should like to borrow them and try how it feels again. And at least we are all anxious to keep our youth, or to make belief that we have kept it. It is not an agreeable thing to know that our strength is going, and that all the beauty we ever had is going,

and that the freshness, and the colour, and the elasticity are going, and that we are only fit to be put on the shelves and labelled antiquated and done with. Most people try to look younger than they are, and there is no great sin in that, unless it is overdone with the paint brush. It is a sin which the Lord will readily forgive, especially in these times when the older people are so unceremoniously thrust aside, and the young have the run of the field. And yet of the two I would rather feel young than look young: if I could not have both, and that to some of us is out of the question. What you are in yourselves is the main thing, and not what people think of you—what your heart says, and not what your looking-glass shows. And a really good man never feels old—never! how can he? He may need crutches to walk with, and spectacles to see the faces of his dearest friends, but his heart is just as fresh and new as a spring morning because it is cram full of faith and love and hope. A real Christian calls himself a *child* of God. It is no empty figure of speech. He is a child of God, and feels it. He is ever learning like a child, and he is as trustful as a child, and as restful; and he looks forward to a bigger life, and dreams beautiful dreams, and his heart sometimes dances for joy, though his feet have not much spring and movement left in them. I tell you it is not the calendar and the birthday book that determine your age. It is the soul within, and the eyes you look out with, and the mind that thinks,

and the heart that feels. It is health that makes young blood, not mere health of body, but health of spirit, health of temper, health of affection. No one is old who can sing with the children and enjoy their songs. No one is old who loves children and can sympathise with them. No one is old who loves each glad spring-time as it comes, and thanks God for it. No one is old so long as he can enjoy innocent things, or is glad when others enjoy them. No one is old so long as he feels that this world is part of the great Father's house, which will open out presently into a more spacious chamber called heaven. No one is old until his heart is dried up and withered like a mummy, and all his affections are dead, and he has really nothing to live for except to keep his own miserable self alive. It is envy that makes people old—envy and jealousy and covetousness and malice, and the blind worship of self, and the bitter tongue, and the sour heart, and the discontent which is always growing, and the thanklessness which is always blind, and the coarse indulgence and passions which defile and deprave the soul, and the unbelief which sees no God anywhere, and the faithlessness which finds nothing lovable in men. I declare to you that it is sin and wrongdoing, and wrong thinking that makes a man feel old. That more than anything else. You talk about a man being aged by his troubles. You say, look at him. His hair has been turned well-nigh white in a short time by the terrible griefs and disappointments he has had.

And that is quite true. But if he has a kind, gentle heart and trust in God, though he may never look young again, the glad, young feelings will come back to him, and that is the main thing. But a selfish, sinning, God-despising man grows old inside, and there is no curing that except by God's conversion. You must make that man new in Christ Jesus before ever he will feel young again. A bad life, as this prophet says, comes to bear the weight and weariness of a hundred years upon it.

If you young people want to grow old very soon, I can give you an infallible recipe for it. Live in a little world—talk and think about nothing but sports and pleasures; love nobody but yourselves, and do nothing to make anybody else love you; rail against the world because it ill uses you, and be envious of everybody who is a little better off than you are; walk in the way of transgressors, indulge your appetite without check; sneer at religion, poke fun at the Bible, persuade yourselves that all Christians are hypocrites, and that there is no particular good in any men. Forget God, and go your own way in defiance of Him. There you have it in a nutshell. I guarantee that if you take that line, long before you have reached what ought to be the best days of manhood, you will feel as old and dry as mummies, and life will be as empty as a broken eggshell, and you will begin to wonder why God made you, and perhaps to wish that He had not made you at all. But, I think, if I were you, I would leave that recipe

to those who like it, and follow a more promising course. Surely it is the healthy mind, and the pure, sweet heart that make young life. It shall come to pass, says the prophet, that a man shall die a hundred years old, and yet be a child. Live for other people a little. Think more for other people. Try to make the world a little happier. Fill your lives with useful work. Read what is worth reading. Get into companionship with good souls, think noble thoughts, fear God and keep His commandments, and then you will begin to understand what the prophet meant.

There are three things in a child which makes child life happy and beautiful—faith, hope, and love. Faith in God, mother, friends, and all men. Hope of to-morrow, hope for the years which are coming, hope of the better things which lie beyond; and love: the joy of loving, and the joy of being loved. There you have all the best things in a child's life. And these three things are in the life of every good man and woman. Certainly they are in the life of every Christian. They never leave him however long he lives. They are with him through all life's rough scenes. They are with him on his dying bed. Now abideth these three—faith, hope, and charity. He is full of faith in what he cannot see, in God and Jesus Christ, and the kindly arms which keep him, and the tender eyes which keep watch over him. He is abounding in hope. He believes that the world is moving on to better things, and that there

are better things in store for him. He is not always looking back dolefully on the past, as if he had left all the good things behind. His eyes are in front. The future belongs to him, and God's golden age is yet to come; and he is cram full of love, God's love and his own love. He has a kindly feeling towards everyone, and the world is full of glory and joy when it is full of love.

You may be sure that where these things are, even in a small measure—faith, hope, and love—life will clothe itself each day with new spring robes of beauty, and the heart will remain as young as a child's though it has felt the storms of seventy years and more.

That song which I quoted is not such a hopeless sigh as you might suppose. "Make me a child again just for to-night." It might come to pass with some of you if you could be brought to-night to begin life afresh in the faith and service of Jesus Christ. All things would be made new, and most things young again. And I know that in heaven we shall all be made young, for they serve there day and night without ever getting tired, and they who behold God's face cannot grow old.

THE HIGHER CITIZENSHIP

(*Citizen Sunday*)

“Now therefore ye are no more strangers and foreigners, but fellow citizens with the saints, and of the household of God.”
—EPHESIANS ii. 19.

THE words were addressed to Christians of Gentile birth who had been brought out of the darkness of paganism into Gospel light. The apostle reminds them that in the days of their ignorance they had no part in God's promises and in the hope of Israel. They were separated by a great wall from the elect people. The Jews were God's household, and they were outside, like dogs. But now the Cross of Jesus has broken down the dividing wall and brought Jew and Gentile together. The Heavenly light shines equally on the faces of both. Faith makes all races of one kin and kind. We are all alike fellow-citizens with the saints and of the household of God. And this is the word to which I direct your thoughts. St Paul is the only New Testament writer who speaks of the Christian life as a citizenship. He uses the figure frequently. Our citizenship is in heaven, he says. Let your citizenship be such as becometh

the Gospel of Christ ; we look for a city which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God. We have come to the city of the living God. The figure laid hold of him doubtless because he alone among the apostles was a Roman citizen. Inspiration takes the colour of the channel through which it flows. The thoughts came from a higher source, but the words and illustrations are the writer's own, suggested by his surroundings and habits of mind. St Paul was a Roman by political status, though of Jewish race. It was a coveted privilege, which men would have bought with half their fortune if it had been on sale. He was as proud of it as he could be of any earthly thing, as proud nearly as we are of being British subjects. He knew what great things it involved both in the way of honour and responsibility, and this fact made him think of the Christian life as a noble and elevated citizenship. And now, even at the risk of wearying you, I still dwell upon this figure, and ask :

What were the special features of Roman citizenship which St Paul transferred to our higher calling? This citizenship was in many respects a unique thing. At least there is nothing in the modern world quite like it. When you speak of a citizen of Leicester or of London, you think of one who has either been born, or spent the best years of his life there, who has home, friends, and interests centred in its activities. Roman citizenship did not mean that. It was an imperial privilege rather than

local. London indeed gives its freedom to a few honoured strangers, and that bears a faint resemblance to the Roman practice. The Roman citizenship was conferred upon a few persons all over the empire, persons who had never set foot in the great city. It was given to them for some service they had done, and descended to their children. Paul did not see Rome until he was an old man, but he was all his life a Roman citizen. And it meant in brief three things:—First, it was a grand Freemasonry. It brought a man into companionship and brotherhood with Romans everywhere. It gave him entrance to the best society. It made him one of a superior race, and put upon him a mark of nobility. Secondly, it conferred upon him certain legal rights. It was an ægis of protection over him. Roman law and all Rome's power were behind him. He could not be tried, condemned, or punished save by Romans, and if ever he was wronged, misjudged, falsely accused, he had the privilege of carrying his cause to the highest court, and appealing to Cæsar himself. And thirdly, there was his responsibility. Wherever he lived, in Tarsus or Ephesus, he remembered that he was a Roman, that Roman manners were expected of him, that his conduct must be that of an imperial race, and that he must try to fashion the place of his abode and the things of daily life as far as possible after Rome's best models. And now, if you bear these things in mind, you will see the exceeding beauty of this figure, and leap at once to its applications.

Fellow-citizens with the Saints and of the household of God.

1. The Christian life brings us into a grand communion. It is an entrance to the best society. It makes us akin to the choice and elect spirits of every age and place. St Paul believed in an aristocracy of faith. He believed with all his heart that the highest peerage was reached not by climbing the ladder of earthly titles and dignities, but by spiritual elevation and moral ascension with Christ, and that the real kings and nobles of the earth were those on whom God had laid His hands and sealed for His service. He felt that they had no need to covet the rank and distinctions which the world confers, or to fret over their exclusion from its gaudy gilded societies and the splendour of its palaces and courts. They were rich in more imperishable treasures, ennobled by a higher birth, children of God, brethren of Jesus, fellow-heirs with all the Saints, bound by ties of spiritual kinship with all the pure, brave, righteous souls that had ever lived. They could cast their thoughts back through all the ages and claim fellowship with the whole fraternity of large-hearted, truth-loving men; they could look up and say, We are in touch with those behind the veil; we are come unto the spirits of just men made perfect. We are compassed about by a great cloud of witnesses; we walk not far away from the white-robed ones;—this is the companionship

in which we live : fellow-citizens with the Saints and of the household of God.

Now, that is the grand promotion which Christ has put within the reach of every man. For most of us there is no other elevation possible. We have to abide, as St Paul says, in the calling wherein we have been called. The world is split up into classes and castes which jealously reserve themselves to themselves. They keep the door strictly guarded. You cannot get into the upper ten thousand, though you wear your knees to bone in climbing. There are a few ambitious persons who would sell their souls to purchase admission to society, but they do not often succeed even at that price. It is possible to buy a baronetcy, but it requires prodigious expenditure and it does not secure a particle of respect. The world's grander distinctions are beyond your sphere. You have not gifts enough to be admitted to the circles of literature and art. You might as well attempt to mount to the moon as win a peerage of the realm, and even to write the coveted M.P. after your names is an ambition which only one in a hundred thousand ever dreams of. All these things are closed to us. What of that? I pity the fools who sit biting their fingers outside these doors, sighing as if heaven had shut them out, and perhaps grinding their teeth with rage because they cannot get in. Thank God the door which leads to the best society is open to all. I would rather be able to say I am a companion of all that fear Thy name than be able to boast that I

have been introduced at Court. I would rather grasp the hand of a good man than stoop to receive the patronage of the greatest. I would rather be distantly akin to Abraham, David, and Paul, than brother or son to a millionaire. The men of faith, reverence, purity, and love, are the salt, light, and glory of the earth. Let me be ranked with them. I cannot imagine any higher distinction. Let me be a friend of the friends of Jesus. Give me a place in the society of those who have battled, and still battle, for truth, righteousness, and God's kingdom—the upright, the brave, the long-suffering, the patient, the unspotted from the world. Give me some of their spirit, temper, and conduct, so that I may have a right to call them brethren, companions in labour, and fellow-soldiers, and I aspire no higher. If we believe in Christ at all, we believe with all our hearts in the communion of saints. The excellent of the earth, they are our delight. Write my name among God's worthiest, and I care not where else it may be written. We are fellow-citizens with the saints and of the household of God.

2. The Christian life brings us under a higher judgment. Like the Roman citizen, we can only be tried by our spiritual peers. There is no criticism or condemnation which we need to fear, save that which comes from men who are equal to us or superior in faith and goodness; and even from their verdict we have a right to appeal to a higher court, to the great King Himself—Jesus. That higher judgment bar is

invisible. It often feels very far off, and its sentence of acquittal or well done can sometimes hardly be heard amid the din of common voices, amid the clatter of just and unjust criticism, of which each one of us is occasionally the centre. But a Christian man in all his best moods deliberately and consciously falls back on that, and carries his misjudged cause to the city and throne which are out of sight, even as Paul the Roman appealed to Rome. The man with an enlightened and sensitive Christian conscience is able, in a measure, to judge all men, but he himself is judged of none. In the great critical hours of life he refuses to be judged of men—to his own Master he stands or falls. A good man does not despise popular opinion. He does not set himself up with haughty disdain above the voices even of the least thoughtful and the most unworthy—to be thought well of by one's fellow-men is an ambition which only the cynic and the misanthrope sneer at and scout. But there are times when all that has to be set aside in obedience to higher calls. No man will continue in a righteous path and consistently follow noble ends, if he is swayed by popular opinion and in ceaseless dread of it. It is a poor, fickle thing—it changes with the wind, its bravoës and its hisses are never far apart; it stones the prophets, or it glorifies them according to its whim. It is often low and immoral, and even brutal and degrading. A good man must at times set his face against it and his heart above it. He must be guided by the thoughts of his moral

peers—the judgment of fifty righteous men is of more value than the frothy cries of ten thousand frivolous heads and crazy hearts—and in those dark and trying times, when even worthy men doubt him and dissent from him, then he must fall back upon the unerring judge, who can never make a mistake, and ask not what do they say in the city around me, but what do they say in the city above. That has been the language of all the saints. It was what made them saints. They were ever referring to the higher court. From human bars their appeal went to the King: Judge thou my cause! And by that spirit and rule all must live who are fellow-citizens with the saints and of the household of God.

3. The Christian life is an endeavour to bring every place under the higher rule. I have reminded you that the Roman citizen, wherever he lived, was guided, influenced, and swayed by the all-pervading power, laws, and thoughts of that imperial city. It was out of sight, invisible, and unknown, as heaven is to us, yet it was always present with him, speaking to him and shaping his conduct. The saints have always been citizens of heaven in that sense; and Christians to-day have thus their citizenship in heaven. They are asked to carry into all scenes and societies the principles, the directing forces, and the very atmosphere of the city which is beyond the clouds. Their lives are to be ruled from above and not from below, and no matter what place they fill, there is to be that solemn sense of duty, that con-

sciousness of a divine superintendence, that promptness of obedience to the great Master's word, and that longing to bring all things into subjection to Him which made the saints strong, brave, and true, which lifts up and dignifies the very drudgeries of life, and makes every spot which a man treads a little like heaven itself. It used to be said of a Roman that wherever he went and whatever he did, he was a Roman still. He could never be anything else. I wish that could be said of every Christian, as it ought to be. John Bright once confessed that he never gave an important vote or made a speech until he had wrestled in prayer for direction. If we did that—if we earnestly prayed each morning that in every action of the day we might feel the guiding hand of God, there would be a certain spiritual elevation in all that day's speech and conduct. It is a high reach, indeed, to be under heaven's rule continually. It seems too high for us weak mortals, yet it is what all the saints tried to realise; and it is by following out that, in a measure, we become fellow-citizens with the saints and of the household of God.

CHRISTIAN CITIZENSHIP

(Citizen Sunday)

"Only let your citizenship be as it becometh the gospel of Christ."—PHILIPPIANS i. 27.

I READ the text as St Paul gave it. The word conversation, as the old version has it, is misleading. The apostle is speaking not of what we mean by conversation, but of the conduct which befits a citizen who is also a Christian, and therefore it is the very text to suggest appropriate thoughts for Citizen Sunday, and it shows us on what line our thoughts should move. I have been asked, I believe in common with all the ministers of the town, to use part of this day in discoursing on the duties of citizens, and have consented, though not without some hesitation—hesitation begotten of my high regard for the sanctuary hour and its exercises.

The idea of Citizen Sunday is admirable if it is carried out in a properly Christian way, but not if it is meant to lower our high Sabbath ideal, not if there is any disposition to drag the one day of devotion and spiritual uplifting into the hurly burly of the

streets and wrangling crowd. The further we can get away on this one day from the things which are wearing out our poor brains and hearts all the other days the better it will be for both body and soul. The keenest politician may well thank God for an hour and a place in which the din of politics is silenced and the strife of parties forgotten. And the most enthusiastic devotee of gas, water, sanitation, and municipal perfectionism should heave a sigh of relief when, for a few blessed moments, he is permitted to think of other things. We put the highest value upon newspapers in their proper place and sphere, but there are few of us who would wish to have the pulpit reduced into a Sunday edition of the newspapers. Render unto the six days the things which belong to them, and let God have a chance with us on the day which He calls His own. The great danger in the present time is not so much the danger of forgetting the duties of this world, but of growing oblivious to the fact that there is another world, that earth is canopied by heaven, and that each man and woman has not only a body to be provided for, but also a soul to be saved. The day of solemn assembly ought to be a perpetual reminder of these easily-forgotten things. It ought to be a season of moral and spiritual elevation, and perhaps above all things, a season in which God's peace and Christ's charity rule in every heart, and there is an end for the time of the debates, divisions, clamours, and ambitions of the noisy throng. That, I venture to say, is what

all earnestly religious people wish our Sunday to be, and to make it other than that would be, to the Christian mind at least, to degrade it.

Yet a talk about Christian citizenship need not at all descend from that high level. You lift the question at once to the highest plain and you enfold it in a spiritual atmosphere when you discuss it in the spirit of these words. Let your citizenship be as it becometh the gospel of Christ. For the gospel of Christ means the cleansing and redeeming of all that is common. It means the raising and refining of all ordinary obligations. It means the judging and weighing of all things in a spiritual light and by a spiritual standard. It means the bringing down of heavenly law to correct and complete our imperfect human laws and fashions. It means subjecting all things to the test of what the great Master would have us do. St Paul reminds us that our citizenship is in heaven, by which he means not that our thoughts and interests are to be centred and dwell in that unseen and unimaginable world above us, but that our earthly sphere is to be overarched with heaven, that our lives are to be ruled from above and not from below, and that we are to carry into all scenes and societies, all relationships, all public and private concerns, the principles, the motives, the directing forces, and if possible the very atmosphere of that city out of sight where Christ is enthroned as lawgiver and judge. It used to be said of a Roman citizen that wherever he went and whatever he did

he was still and always a Roman citizen. He could never forget it, and he could never be anything else. That ought to be said of everyone whose citizenship is in heaven. Whatever he does and wherever he is, he should be and act as one who is conscious of that higher relationship, and who never forgets the nobility, the privilege, the responsibility, and the obligation of it. And that is all implied in these words: "Let your citizenship be as it becometh the gospel of Christ."

1. I would say the gospel of Christ both allows and requires of us a lofty and enlightened patriotism. It shows little favour to the man who worships securely under his own vine and fig-tree and carefully watches over his own belongings, and has no profound and prayerful interests in the larger community of which he forms part. The gospel sets our feet in a large place and broadens out our sympathies and kinships. It teaches us with the same breath to be both cosmopolitan and patriotic, to love all humanity, yet to give our choicest affection to the people of our own race and kin. He who calls patriotism narrow, charges the Bible with narrowness; he who contends that all nations should be as dear to us as our own is unconsciously condemning Christ for want of breadth and charity. The Bible is suffused with a tender, impassioned patriotism. Psalm and prophecy are all on fire with it. They sometimes overflow with tears at the remembrance of their own dear land. They break down with the longing they have to see the glory of

Israel and the moral upbuilding of their own beloved city. If I forget thee, O Jerusalem, let my right hand forget its cunning. Jesus, though the world's Saviour, never forgot that He was a Jew. All men were precious to Him, but dearer than all the rest were the lost sheep of the house of Israel. And of the two occasions on which we are told that He wept, one was His weeping over the sins and sorrows of His own beloved city of Jerusalem. The patriotism of the Bible and of the gospel is thus both national and local. It is a devoted clinging to the whole people, a sacred pride in the race, and a peculiar affection for the city in which one's life is lived. And it is always a patriotism with a moral and religious tone and colour. It looks beyond the material to the spiritual. It is an impassioned longing and prayer for the establishment of righteousness and truth. It is never a coarse, vulgar pride in wealth, prosperity, and extent of territory. It is a hunger for justice, equity, reverence, and purity. It pants for the divine uplifting of the nation, for the moral cleansing of the city. It wants to see all the people righteous and all the streets and habitations of the city holiness unto the Lord. And that is always the model patriotism for a Christian citizen. Pride in the empire with which the Almighty has entrusted us. A strong pathetic affection for the nation into which we have been born, and a sweet peculiar interest in the city where our lives are lived, and our work is done; but above

all things, an anxious solicitude that the empire should be founded and upheld on a basis of justice and high humanity; that the nation should have righteousness as the girdle of its loins, and that our city should be swept clean of all impurities and made beautiful, not to the outward eye, but to the all-searching eyes of God. When every Christian strives for those ends and cherishes that divine patriotism, then is his citizenship as becometh the gospel of Christ.

2. Further, the gospel of Christ is essentially, and above all things, a gospel of brotherhood. It represents a nation as one body; it makes the people of a city one family; it binds us together by the strongest bonds of kinship and mutual indebtedness. It flings scorn upon that old fratricidal question, Am I my brother's keeper? It tells us that he who lives unto himself dies to all that is divine. It proclaims to us that the supreme law of Christ's kingdom is "Bear ye one another's burdens." It abolishes class distinctions. It bridges over the gulf of social separation. It brings high and low, rich and poor, in one noble commonwealth of equality and love. It requires us, as far as is possible, to live peaceably with all men—to join friendly hands with all honest men, be they never so far apart from us in judgment and opinion, and to cover with the mantle of charity all our conscientious differences. It calls upon the strong to bear with the infirmities of the weak, and the wise to be patient with the unreasonableness of

the ignorant, and the prosperous and happy to hear with sympathy the complaints of the less fortunate and the miserable. Above all things, it teaches us that the good of each should be in a measure shared out to all, and the evils and sorrows of all be the burden of each. Christian citizenship means a daily recognition of our kinship with those about us, of our obligation to those around us. Their pains are ours. Their diseases are ours. Their very degradation is ours to fight against, to enlighten, to heal, and remove, as if we were dealing with our own sores and infirmities. And he who does this best and carries most of the spirit of the cross into his dealings with his fellow-men has best fulfilled this injunction: "Let your citizenship be as it becometh the gospel of Christ.

3. The gospel of Christ enjoins upon us obedience, submission, and reverence towards all rightfully constituted authorities. It requires us to pray for all law-givers, and judges, and magistrates, for all who govern and lead, make laws and administer them. It says we are to pray for them, which means in a wider sense, that when we have the electing of them, they should be men who are somewhat after the character of our prayers, and certainly not men whom we almost regard as past praying for. There are certain things which, to a Christian mind at least, are more important than party divisions and party principles—the moral character and purpose of the men who represent these principles, the

religious tone and temper of the minds which mould the parties. It is impossible to introduce a Christian atmosphere into the discussions of parliament and municipal council, unless you send Christian men to those assemblies. It is impossible to get the highest interests of morality and religion served by those bodies, unless they are to a large extent composed of men to whom righteousness is the first consideration, to whom the moral elevation and redemption of the people is the chief end, and who are themselves in a measure examples of the things which they are endeavouring to accomplish in others. We want men in all these assemblies who will help to infuse a kindly and tolerant, and if possible a Christian, temper into their discussions. Men who will aim to make the atmosphere of a council chamber a little more like that of a well-ordered Church ; men who have no personal ends to serve, but only the highest welfare of the community ; men who will be as conscientious and careful in expending public money as they are in expending their own ; men who, whatever party they belong to, will give their voice and influence unhesitatingly to every reasonable proposal which tends to the removal of evil and corruption, and to the increase of purity, sobriety, and godliness, and especially men whose consciences are not the slaves of the ballot-box, who will think and speak and act as God and the truth within them shall dictate. These are the men whom every Christian citizen will wish to place at the

head of a community ; and in helping to the election of such men we make our citizenship as it becometh the gospel of Christ.

And yet the last thing I have to say is perhaps the best and the most needed. If you would rightly fulfil the duties of a Christian citizen, pray that God will make your own conduct and influence in all departments thoroughly Christian. The most useful citizen is always the best man. Just to live the Christian life yourself is about the biggest thing you can do, and the noblest, and perhaps the greatest contribution you can make to the shaping of the community in a healthy and Christian way. Christianity redeems a city by redeeming its citizens one by one. It is a slow process, but it is effective, and every other method fails in the end.

Pray that your own lives may be rooted and built up in Christ's own goodness, purity, charity, patience, long-suffering, and unselfish love. Pray that you, each one, may carry abroad a sweet savour of Him as you go about among men. Then, indeed, and in the most excellent way, will your citizenship be as it becometh the gospel of Christ.

THE DAY OF ALL SAINTS

(All-saints Day)

“These are they which came out of great tribulation and have washed their robes, and made them white in the blood of the Lamb.”—REVELATION vii. 14.

THE date of this book has always been a disputed question. Whether it was written in the reign of the infamous Nero, or later on, when that monster of cruelty, Domitian, misruled and cursed the world, is a matter which may be left for scholars to settle, if they ever can. Of this one thing we may be assured: it was composed in times of suffering, which have left the marks of tears and blood-drops on the language and thoughts of the writer. The book is a panorama of vividly drawn pictures. Some of them are brilliant with hope and intense joy, painted with colours fetched from a heavenly clime. But most of these pictures have a background of tragical sorrows, long-suffering patience, and bleeding agony. The writer had lived through a period, perhaps more than one period, of persecution and martyrdom. He had seen the powers of this world employing all their resources to quench the light of Christ, and exterminate the

hated sect which bore His name. He had seen or heard of dear friends slaughtered, Paul beheaded, Peter crucified, all or nearly all his fellow-apostles done to death, and a host of less known believers sacrificed to Rome's fury and Rome's lust. He had lived through days which it is difficult for us to imagine, when every Christian, in a sense, died daily, and when nearly every Christian household, like Egypt of old, had at least one dead: and he had watched them calmly facing all these terrors, and holding fast the faith with courage and patience which never faltered, and dying with triumphant hope when their hour came. He had seen *all* this, and now he looks up, and for a moment the veil of the unseen is drawn aside, and he has a vision of these once suffering saints in their glory, wearing the white robes of spotless souls, and waving the palm branches of victory. They have conquered in the earthly fight and received their reward, and they now serve Him day and night in the higher temple. He speaks of them as a multitude which no man can number, out of all nations, kindreds, peoples, and tongues, all of whom had come out of great tribulation and been perfected, like the Master Himself, by their sufferings. And we may well believe that in this innumerable multitude he included not only those who had already fought the fight, but by prophetic anticipation those who should hereafter bear the same noble witness, and by the same endurance of hardness win their place in the white-

robed throng. In fact, these words suggest to us the whole noble army of martyrs and the saints of every age.

Now, if you look in the calendar, you will find that the first day in this month of November is marked as *All-saints* Day. Whilst other days are called after the name of some particular saint, some great apostle, or some other distinguished personage in the history of the Church, this particular day is set apart for the commemoration of the greater company of less known ones who played their part not less bravely and beautifully, and whose names are written in the book of life. In our Free Churches we pay little or no attention to these saint days. They come and go without our knowledge. Indeed, the Romish Church, by attaching a superstitious virtue to these days, and by exalting the saints into objects of worship, has invested the whole thing with an atmosphere of suspicion, and made us almost afraid to name the saints, lest we should share in Rome's idolatry: yet surely this is both a foolish fear and a somewhat weak prejudice. What can be more beautiful than to cherish gratefully and reverently the memory of great and good men who trod this earth with the look of heaven upon their faces, who shone like bright stars of purity amid the gross darkness and corruptions of past times, who bequeathed to us an example of righteousness and valour, and who made the world better fitted to live in for their favoured children of to-day? Even if we do not aspire to be

saints ourselves, if we have little in us of the sturdy stuff out of which giants of faith were made, if we are content to walk on a somewhat low Christian level, giving only the smaller half of our devotion to the higher interests of life, we ought at least to have conscience enough to do homage to those great ideals which other men have followed and attained, and to thank God for all those of whom the world was not worthy, for all those in whom His spirit produced the richest fruits of holiness, and who toiled and suffered for the harvest which we gather. There are some men who are ashamed to own their fathers, because those fathers struggled with early poverty, because amid the strain of early hardship those fathers had little chance of acquiring the lighter graces and superficial refinements of life, because those fathers, with all their sterling worth and godliness, and all the energy and patience which have brought the children wealth and honour, are supposed to be a little vulgar. Vulgar? Well, yes! But of all the vulgarity in the world, there is no vulgarity so coarse and unfeeling as that which forgets its debt of gratitude and despises the unpolished heroism and sufferings by which its own privileges were secured.

And that is just as true on a larger scale. It is essential vulgarity and brutal ingratitude for a privileged generation to despise and forget the greater, but perhaps less polished souls who pioneered the way to freedom, truth, and righteous-

ness, and worked with bleeding hands to clear the jungles, that their children might be brought forth into large and wealthy places. We are apt to think that because this age is so wonderfully clever and enlightened, there were no men in the past who were fit to be compared with our honourable selves. Because we can see further than our fathers did, we fancy that we must be of taller stature, forgetting that we see further because we stand upon their shoulders and survey the world from hill tops which their labours piled up. It does not follow that because we can travel sixty miles an hour and they could only travel ten, that we have six times as much brain power as they had. It only means that we have inherited the results of their genius and persevering toil. The man who made the first rude cart wheel or spanned a brook with the first rough bridge, was greater than the engineer who turns out the superbest modern locomotive or throws some spacious bridge across a channel of the sea. It is the heritage from the past that makes us great. It is because we began where our fathers left off, that our structures tower above theirs, and amid all the glories of this present time, a thoughtful man will see at every step, not so much proofs of our own dazzling superiority, as reminders of how others have laboured, and we have entered into their labours.

Here in our worship this morning we do well to think of all the saints, of the multitude which no man can number, who by their tribulations and heroic

fidelity to truth and goodness, secured for us our lordly heritage. Every religious liberty that we enjoy, every truth that we hold with secure and fearless hands, has been purchased for us by the blood of martyrs, or the blood shed more plenteously on fearful battle-fields. The right to pray where and when you like, to assemble yourselves together for hallowed work, and to raise your sweet songs of praise, has been won for you on the stake, the scaffold, through prison tortures, and amid the smoke of gunpowder. Some of you cannot bear the thought of war. The name of fighting men is an abhorrence to you. You have either short memories or scant knowledge of history. You forget that the noblest rights of man have been wrested from the forces of darkness and tyranny by grim, stern fighting, and that you would all be still held fast in the grip of that Roman superstition, which you hate, if our fathers had not loved righteousness, better even than they loved peace, and had not offered their bodies in mortal conflict with the armies of iniquity and darkness.

Surely if we have any gratitude in our nature, we shall thank God not only for the truths which He has revealed to us, but for the men and women who have handed them down to us, often with blood-stained hands, and with the smoke and flame of martyrs' fires about their faces. We shall thank Him for all those bolder spirits, who made it possible for the most timid and gentle ones to profess His faith in

these milder times of peace. We shall thank Him for all those who, amid trials and temptations and devilries fiercer and darker than we know, kept themselves unspotted from the world, and perpetuated in their beautiful lives the traditions of eternal promise and hope.

We ought to be reminded every time we meet for worship that we are part of a great historic Church, that we have received something from all the saints. Behind us is an unbroken continuity of noble-hearted, Christ-inspired, and heroic men and women, to whom we are joined by relationship and laws of inheritance. "Brothers we are treading where the saints have trod," through corridors overarched with the figures of faith's giants, and echoing with the holy voices of all the bygone centuries. We are marching on the very ground where their battles were fought, and where they left never-to-be-forgotten memories. In a very deep sense they all belong to us—

Angels and living saints and dead,
But one communion make,
All join in Christ their vital head
And of His love partake.

We have a sort of property in them all. There is not a holy apostle or gifted teacher, or fearless martyr, or devout woman that has ever adorned Church annals with brave endurance or lovely life, but we can claim with a beautiful sense of ownership.

Their deeds survive, their words are immortal, their works do follow them, their names are sweeter than all perfumes, their examples remain to stimulate and inspire us. We think their thoughts, we almost feel the breath of their spirits, and the print of their footsteps is all about us to shew us the way to nobler things.

To think of the saints, my brethren, is to gain renewed confidence in God and in the weapons of our warfare. For the saints bear witness to us of an uninterrupted stream of grace and energy, and mighty help, which has come down from the Holy Spirit through eighteen centuries. They tell us of the exhaustless forces of divine love. These men swept aside enormous difficulties by the divinely given might which was in them. In the darkest and most faithless times, they never wavered in their devotion. They kept their souls like polished jewels amid sinks of corruption, and their light burning clearly amid the densest fogs of sin. They were Christians when to be a Christian was one long, grim battle, and were even full of radiant hope and joy under sorrows and tribulations which were heavy enough to crush the heart into mute despair. They did all this because they were not left to themselves, because the forces of the unseen world were allied with them, and in every furnace they had the companionship of the Son of God.

They bid us be of good courage, for they tell us that amid all the change of years and centuries, there

is no change in this: the divine love to which they clung is everlasting and constant. The divine strength by which they were sustained is offered to us as to them. The mighty spirit who made them true and great is waiting at our feet to serve, and the infinite mercy which covered their imperfections is still with us to comfort and restore whenever we stumble and fail.

We, my brethren, have our special fight to wage. It is not like theirs, but it is hard enough at times. Every age has its peculiar foes and its own stern duties. We have our temptations to wrestle with, we have the same world, flesh, and devil to oppose, we have our share of tribulations, and we have all *one* great service laid upon us, as the saints had, to hand down better and nobler things to those who follow us. Let us learn the lessons of courage and devotion which come down to us from all the best voices of the past. Let us hear them repeating to us, as they do, the word which was often given to them: "Be ye faithful unto death." Let us all pray and aspire and endeavour to be counted at last with that multitude which no man can number, who have written all the golden lines in this world's history, and are now in white robes serving in the greater temple.

THE EXCELLENT OF THE EARTH

(All-saints Day)

“I have said unto the Lord, Thou art my Lord ; I have no good beyond Thee. As for the saints that are in the earth, they are the excellent in whom is all my delight.”—PSALMS xvi. 2-3.

I HAVE read to you the revised version of the words, for the older version hardly makes sense, and is certainly not intelligible. In the improved translation, it is possible to follow the psalmist's thought, and we can see that his words contain a very noble confession. There is a whole creed embodied in them, a simple creed, but a large Catholic creed, and the substance of every other creed which is divine and true. For what the writer says is this: “I believe in God as the highest good and the author of all good, and I believe in all good men, because their goodness is part of Him.” It is a fine creed that, and if you read into it all that it implies, there is nothing wanting to the completeness of your faith. In the first of these verses the psalmist declares that the Lord is all in all to him, his treasure and wealth, his

strength and joy: "Thou art my Lord; I have no good beyond Thee." There is nothing worth striving for or delighting in or loving which is outside Thee. But that, you say, is the language of some mystic, lost in the contemplation of God and blinded by the ineffable vision to everything else that is beautiful and noble on earth. Yes, but that was not his meaning at all, as the next verse shews: "I have no good beyond Thee, because all the good that I delight in flows from Thee and is part of Thee. The saints are Thine, the excellent of the earth are Thine; they shew the marks of a divine ownership. They carry the impress and image of Thy truth and goodness. They are the work of Thy hand and the creation of Thy pure spirit. I delight in them, because I see Thee in them. As for the saints that are in the earth, they are the excellent in whom is all my delight."

What he confesses there is, then, that he finds the highest and supreme satisfaction in God, and as a part of that, he is drawn towards all good men, because their goodness is the gift and endowment of the all-loving and all-adorable One. And surely there is a cluster of wise and beautiful thoughts there for us.

1. To see all goodness in God is to see God in all goodness. To love Him with the whole heart is to love well every broken light of Him and to love every human life that shews the least resemblance to Him. For all things which reflect His beauty have first received His grace and felt the touch of

His spiritual creativeness. As St Paul tells us, whatsoever things are just, honest, pure, lovely, and of good repute, are to be thought of with reverent delight; for they are all in a sense divine. They are not born of flesh and blood or of the world and its lusts, but spring into birth where the spirit of God is moving. They are the perfect gifts which come down from the Father of lights. In all good, brave, clean-thoughted and high-minded lives, we behold as in a glass a little of the glory of the Lord, just as you see the sunshine mirrored in every ripple on a summer pool. Good men are the temples in which He dwells and through whose windows His beauty is always shining. The saintliness of the saint is a part of God. The excellence of the excellent is not only His gift, but something of His very self. They bring us into touch with His very spirit. As Christ was the one great incarnation of the divine, so every one in whom Christ's thoughts and emotions are enshrined is a minor incarnation, bearing witness that God is not far from any one of us.

And we can never be wrong in believing that wherever there is downright sweet goodness, there is God. All the excellent of the earth have come out of the same creative mould, and are one and the same workmanship. No matter what religious dress they wear, they are known of Him, and His secret marks are on them. They are in every Church and of every creed. They are sometimes

men who would be kept outside every Church, and whom every creed would disown; but they are recognised by Him whose thoughts are larger than all the Churches, and whose free spirit refuses to be bound by human rules and orthodoxies. Thank God we have grown out of the narrowness which suspected all goodness that did not come labelled with a particular ticket and using one particular phraseology. We have risen to the larger conception of God's mind and purpose. We have learned that His spirit passes over all our petty boundaries to work wheresoever He will, and to produce manifold forms of beauty—moral and spiritual beauty—amid the utmost diversity of beliefs. Where the fruits of the Spirit are, there is the Spirit, and it is blasphemy against the Holy Ghost to say they come from any other source. God's saints wear no uniform. They come out of no one school, they are rich and varied with the many-coloured wisdom of God. I call to mind the men of our own times who have most impressed the world as the excellent of the earth—men of exceptional goodness:—Frederick Robertson, Kingsley, and Maurice; Canon Liddon, John Henry Newman, Francis Newman, and Spurgeon; James Martineau, John Ruskin, Abraham Lincoln, Garfield, Gordon, Gladstone, and John Bright. They were all essentially religious men, but as widely separated in ecclesiastical and doctrinal beliefs as minds could be. They represented almost every school of thought. Yet their lives made one

sweet music. There was in them a fine harmony of purpose and spirit. They had all the same upward look, the same high ideals, the same love of truth and reverence for duty, the same generous sympathies and unselfish aims, devotion to God and affection for their fellow-men. They had all drunk of the same spirit and received out of the fulness of Christ grace upon grace. All goodness of every type is the outflow of the one great fountain of eternal truth and love, and when we delight in goodness most, then are we worshipping Him who is the author and perfection of it all.

2. He who loves God will, like this psalmist, be drawn by a powerful attraction of sympathetic delight towards all good men. As for the saints that are in the earth, they are the excellent in whom is all my delight. Our religious life proves itself by its attractions, affinities, kinships, and communions. We are drawn towards that which bears our qualities. We like to be in the company of those whose deepest thoughts and highest aspirations harmonise with our own. It is not so much intellectual kinship as soul kinship that binds lives together and makes truest friends. It is a joy to love those whose hearts beat in tune with mine. It is a hard duty to love those who care not for the things which are most and best to me. The coarse and carnal man gravitates to his own kind. The spiritual man is never quite at home, except with the spiritual. The men and women you like are the lenses and

mirrors through which you discover your real selves. If I am on perfectly free and happy terms with the thoughtless, the vulgar, and the sensual, it is because I am just that myself. If I can laugh when profane wit shoots its coarse pleasantries and irreverent jests, it is because my inner nature has no purity or refinement. If I court the society of those whose ambitions are all on the gold, glitter, and shows of life, it is because my own thoughts are chained down to the ruck and muck of common things. A good man inclines to good men. A god-fearing man seeks by sweet instinct the companionship of the reverent, dutiful, and god-fearing. And your affinities prove the stuff you are made of. He who truly delights in the communion of saints has always something of the saint in himself. He who likes to be with the faithful of the land has the soul of faith. Goodness is a magnet which pulls to itself irresistibly all goodness. Every true child of God says with the psalmist: "I love them that love Thee. I am a companion of all that fear Thy name."

If you have no delight in the excellent of the earth, you have no part at all in our religion. You have never learned, or you have forgotten everything that the Bible teaches. For that book on every page proclaims the divinity and supremacy of goodness. It lifts moral and spiritual qualities into unchallenged pre-eminence. The Bible is the pantheon, not of genius and greatness, but of pure, brave, humble, self-denying lives. It has no extravagant admiration for

gifts of intellect, but it has a passionate admiration for graces of heart. It passes with contemptuous silence over the doings of the world's proud and uplifted men, but lingers lovingly over the lowliest life that does God's will, and over the humblest deeds of self-forgetting and patient faith. It flings scorn upon the glory of Solomon, but puts a halo of real glory on the widow's two mites. It delights in bringing down the mighty, and lifting neglected worth to the seat of honour. It gives more space to that heathen woman of Sarepta, who shared her last meal with a stranger, than it devotes to the notable conquerors and empire builders of the world. Names and achievements that were making the whole world agape with wonder find no mention in its pages. But stories of despised and rejected ones, who were enduring shame and poverty for truth's sake, are written down everywhere with notes of admiration. The grandeur of a Cæsar is nothing to it, but the tears of a penitent and the prayer of a publican are most precious. The faith and humility of a Roman centurion is made more of than all Rome's conquering legions. A Dorcas who helps the poor has a place in its picture gallery, whilst all the kings of the earth are pushed out. The culture of the ancient world, and all its famous poets and philosophers, are ignored, but the labours and sacrifices of twelve ignorant peasants and fishermen are invested with eternal glory. It keeps all its eulogies for unregarded saints, for prophets who spent most of their lives in prison, for souls unknown

to fame who were obedient to each heavenly vision, for men who were not great in their own esteem or in the world's esteem, but who did justly, shewed mercy, followed the calls of duty, and walked humbly with their God ; that is the language of the divine revelation throughout. As for the saints that are in the earth, they are its salt, its light, its jewels, its precious things, the excellent in whom is all my delight.

That, my brethren, is our religion, and if there be not a measure of that spirit in you, religion has no real place in your hearts. In the days of youth we admired cleverness, genius, the brilliant intellect, the man of wit, smartness, and nimbleness ; we admired oratory, beauty, grace of form, voice, song, and speech. As we passed on into manhood, we were caught perhaps by the worship of power, gold, success, and the craft which wins success. But as the years increase, and the deeper experiences of life, and the dear love of God takes firmer hold upon us, and the higher wisdom, all these things take a second place, and the good and true and lowly souls get the first place in our affections. Every good man prays, Send us more good men, O God, not giants, but men of faith, men of high purpose, of unswerving rectitude, men to whom the face of duty is the face of God, men full of human love and heavenly pity, men in whom conscience is supreme, and who have no ends to serve but God and righteousness. We want, above all things, good men in statesmanship, in parliaments,

and councils and city life; good men to raise the moral tone, and breathe a purer atmosphere into the thoughts and endeavours, and sweeten the lives of all of us. The healing of the world is in its nameless saints. May God multiply them. As for the saints that are in the earth, they are the excellent in whom is all my delight.

3. I leave this with you as my closing word: That he who delights in good men will wish that only good men should delight in him. Sweet to all of us is the breath of human praise and human favour, and the soft south flower-scented winds of human applause and popularity. It is only affectation or envy that pretends to despise and ignore that. Yet, if we are good men, the value of all that will be the mouths, and hearts, and lives from which it comes. A good man has no burning desire to commend himself to the crowd of base, carnal, self-seeking, sensual men. He never frets his poor heart away, because they refuse to speak well of him. He would rather have the censure of a thousand coarse and ungodly minds, than the disapproval of one, who has the mind of Christ. I would rather have the praise and love of one true, generous, large-hearted, Christian man, than a whole volume of flattery from the lips of the lewd, or pleasure-worshipping, or gold-worshipping multitude. Let me stand well with God and those who love God, and I can bear to be without the rest. Let me hear what the excellent of the earth say of me, the kisses

of their lips are sweet, because they are true, the praises of their life are echoes and anticipations of the Master's well done. As for the saints, they are the excellent of the earth, in whom is my delight.

THE HARVEST WHICH WE ARE ALWAYS REAPING

(All-souls Day)

"Say not ye, there are yet four months, and then cometh harvest? Behold, I say unto you, lift up your eyes, and look on the fields; for they are white already to harvest."—JOHN iv. 35.

OUR Lord never missed the lessons of the seasons, and He never failed to point them out to His disciples. He heard all the voices of nature, and gave them a divine interpretation. The texts for His sermons were found in sky, earth, and air, in waterbrooks and murmuring winds. He preached on winter and spring-time, golden summer and fruitful autumn. But the singular thing is that the harvest sermon which He preached here was out of its due season. It was in the early spring-time, when the sowing was going on, or had just been completed. The fields were probably bare, or at best showed only the first tiny shoots of green. Four months must pass before the reaping-time appeared. Yet He looked across the broad, ploughed lands with His clear, prophetic eyes, and saw the

harvest already ripe for the gathering. In fact, He was looking beyond those fields to a greater harvest, a moral and spiritual harvest, a harvest of human souls.

He had just found an ignorant Samaritan woman waiting for His message, and ready to receive it. Her mind, though very dark, had quickly opened to His light. She had even been prepared for it by her toils, and weariness, and sorrows. And she seemed to Him just a type of the world of men. The world was waiting for Him in the same way. It was like a harvest ready for the reaping. And He pointed this out to the disciples. God had been getting the world ready for their work. Wise men of every sort had been at work, teachers and prophets, martyrs, and faithful souls innumerable, had done the sowing, and the very needs of men, their sorrows, gropings, and darkness, had helped to make all things ready for the labours to which He was sending them, for the great ingathering which He Himself would reap. There was no need to wait, the waiting time was over, the ripe grain invited them. "Lift up your eyes and look on the fields, for they are white already to harvest." And so we get some harvest suggestions here.

I. And first, the Saviour reminds us that we are always gathering a harvest for which we have done no sowing. The sowing has been done by other hands. Others have laboured, and we have entered

into their labours. We are every day and hour of our lives reaping with joy what our fathers and forerunners, perhaps braver and wiser men than ourselves, sowed in tears. Frederic Harrison, the Positivist, and men of his school, tell us that we ought to worship the humanity of the past, the great and noble men who prepared our heritage, digged all our wells of wisdom, and toiled and suffered that we might have a goodly portion. They call that the religion of humanity. And there is a great truth in it, though not *the* truth. We are taught to worship God alone, from whom all the fearless thinkers and earnest workers of the past received their gifts and inspiration; but we are also taught to hold in reverential memory all the valiant, and self-forgetting, and true-hearted men, men of whom the world was not worthy, who chose the hard and thankless path that life might be made easier and sweeter for us. And there is no surer proof of a coarse and ignorant nature than to sneer at the men of the past, in glorifying the present, and to forget the debt we owe them.

There is not a single step we take, or a bit of work we do, or a thought that passes through our minds, that does not owe something to the genius, the inventiveness, the patience, and the drudgery of better and nobler men than ourselves. There is nothing in our possessions to make us proud, but there is everything to make us grateful. For there is hardly anything which we have won by our own

swords. Everything was won for us by the sword, and sweat, and blood-drops of others. We have done no digging, quarrying, smelting, and coining. We just take the gold as it comes bright from the mint. The knowledge we have was acquired for us by men who wore out their brains in searching hidden depths, pursuing nature's secrets, and wresting light out of the very darkness. The freedom we enjoy was wrung by bleeding hearts and bleeding hands, from tyrants and oppressors, throned in injustice and brute force. The Bible we read came from men who got their inspiration through tears and fightings and martyrs' pangs. And the religion which is our consolation, strength, and hope, was given to us by the humiliation of a divine sufferer, by the nails and spear of a Calvary, and by the dying witness of apostles who braved all things to follow Him.

Everywhere and in all things we are reaping fruits for which we have not toiled, and holding in our hands the wages which those who earned them never received. The whole field of modern life is a ripe, rich harvest-field, where we are gathering armfuls of golden grain for which we did no sowing, and no ploughing, and no waiting. "We are heirs of all the ages in the foremost ranks of time," and we are debtors to every good and gifted man who has trod the earth before us.

And out of all this there comes to every thoughtful man an incentive to noble endeavour. We ought

to be better men and women than almost the best of those whose lot was cast in other times, for we have all the ennobling truths they gave us, and all the clear light and knowledge for which they dimly groped and painfully travailed; we have all the great and valiant deeds they did to inspire us, and furnish us with worthy models. We have all the treasures of their experience to make us wise and morally wealthy. Yes, we ought to be better men. And we are under obligation to do for our world something like what they did for theirs. We cannot reward them for their services, we cannot pay them back the debt we owe. We can only shew our gratitude by catching their spirit and imitating their works. It is to God that we must pay the debt and to our fellow-men, by sowing the seeds of goodness and brave endeavour for them to reap and those who come after. That is the first harvest lesson which Jesus teaches us in these words: "Lift up your eyes, and behold the plentiful harvest which has been prepared for you."

2. He teaches us here that we begin to reap the harvest of our own lives long before the autumn comes. We begin to reap the harvest even before the spring season has passed. Say ye not there are yet four months, and then cometh harvest: lift up your eyes, the fields are white with the ripe grain now. The harvest is always at hand. You have not to wait for it. The reaping is continually going on, and God is always paying His labourers their wages.

In our lives the sowing and the reaping are never far apart. Some of the grain takes a long time to come to perfection, we have to wait years for the return, but a great part of the seed we sow matures quickly, and we are gathering the fruit not long after the scattering.

We are often preached to about the coming autumn-time of life, when every man will receive and gather according to the labour which he has done in the earlier years. And we all believe that the autumn-time will yield returns of the same quality and kind as the sowing. We know that a rich and fruitful, honoured, beloved, and hopeful old age depends upon the way we spend the years that lead up to it. We talk about the evening time, when the full wages will be paid, whether they are the wages of sin or the wages of righteousness; and we talk about the final reckoning, when God will reward every man according to his works. And all that is true talk. It is true that the greater harvest is deferred. But do not forget, says Jesus, that you begin reaping almost as soon as you begin to work and think at all. Four months, and then cometh harvest: thirty or forty years, and then cometh harvest. No, it is upon you already. You are in the harvest field to-day. Be you young or old, each day is made up yesterday and many previous yesterdays. The neglects of to-day follow you into to-morrow. The follies and imprudences and self-indulgences impair the intelligence, and diminish the fitness for

work which you need on following days. The forgetfulness of God on this day will make it harder for you to think rightly of Him the next; and the sins of the present hour give you a greater facility in sinning in the hours that are coming on.

And all good thoughts and right endeavours, all faithful discharge of duty, all prayers and earnest strivings which you put into the time that now is, have their immediate consequences and their immediate reward. They make you happier men to-morrow, better equipped men, cleaner conscientised men, kindlier men in thought and speech, better loved, and more dearly honoured. They help you on the morrow to enter the fulness of life, and face all its tasks with brave and cheerful heart. Do not think that either God or the prince of evil keeps all the wages back for the final and decisive reckoning. They both pay part of the wages every day. You say there are four months, and then cometh harvest. No, says the Lord. Your harvest-time begins at once, and goes on always. That is the second lesson which He gives us in these words.

3. And the third and last lesson is a call to service. Look on the fields which need your labours and demand them. The whole world was in his eyes a harvest field summoning every earnest man to take his share in gathering and reaping for the Lord. He saw all the darkened hearts and sorrowful lives; and

He heard them calling to Him, though they did not understand their own cries. He saw all the works of sin and iniquity bringing forth the fruits of shame and misery. He saw all the minds that groped in gloom and despondency because they knew not the God of Hope. He saw all the wrongs which needed to be redressed, and all the injustices which pleaded for removal, and all the ignorance which was just blind for want of knowledge and light. The whole world's woes, pains, and despairs were spread before Him. And He said it is the harvest field of God; and He asks for labourers. It was the harvest field of God to Him, and His great joy was to be in it reaping. "My meat is to do the will of Him that sent Me, and to finish His work." And he that reapeth in this field receiveth wages and gathereth fruit unto life eternal. And that is the view of the world which He would have His servants take. It is not merely a world of gay spring flowers and summer gladness. It is a harvest world inviting toil and summoning to duty at every step. It is a field in which the harvest is always more plentiful than the labourers. And there never was a time in which the harvest was more abundant than it is to-day. Never was there more good work waiting at men's doors than is waiting at our doors to-day. In one or more of a thousand ways we can do a bit of reaping for the Lord of harvest. And there is no need for the youngest to wait. He can bring forth some fruits of righteousness in his own life; yes, and

in the lives of others too, now, while it is called to-day.

Say not there are four months, and then we shall be in the harvest field; lift up your eyes and look on the fields, they are already white unto harvest.

THE MESSAGE OF THE CHRISTMAS ANGEL

(Sunday before Christmas)

“And the angel said unto them : Fear not, for, behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people.”—LUKE ii. 10.

I CANNOT give you anything but Christmas thoughts to-day, though we are still more than half a week from the appointed time. But I do not like to let the season pass without a Christmas message from this pulpit, and next Sunday it will be too late. The event will have come, and we shall wish to talk about other things. And what better word can I read to you at this or any other season than the word which the angel said and which the shepherds heard when the Lord of all was born. “Fear not, for behold I bring you good tidings of great joy.” That was the voice which fell like a bright particular star from heaven, on one dark silent spot of earth, and the star has gone on shining with increasing magnitude and glory, until it has covered our whole firmament with light. These words, so brief and simple, are

immortal words, imperishable, unforgettable, throbbing with divine force and divine good-will, and ever expanding as the world learns more of their meaning. Perhaps no words were ever spoken which the human heart has more eagerly welcomed and more lovingly treasured than these. Heaven sent them, and to-day earth repeats and echoes them in sweet thoughts and glad songs innumerable as the murmurs of the sea: "Fear not, for behold I bring you good tidings of great joy."

1. First, they spell out in almost childlike letters the meaning of the great mystery, the mystery of the incarnation, the mystery of God manifest in the flesh. The mystery is beyond us, it is as far beyond the wisest mind as the simplest. Philosophy bows in dumb awe before it. I do not think the highest angel could explain it. How God could enshrine and incarnate Himself in the body of a little child! It baffles all thought and imaginings.

But what the incarnation was and did for us is written here. It was, is, and always will be, to those who believe it, good tidings of great joy. For it was all beautiful. It made human life beautiful, it endowed the human heart with the wealth of immeasurable hopes, it recreated man's world and painted his sky with the colours of an everlasting morning. We know only a small part of what the coming of Jesus meant to us, but that part which we do know is exceeding great and wonderful. It was the unveiling of a father's face to His children. It

was humanity the prodigal son receiving the father's kiss. It was the coming down of heaven's blessedness into the sorrows of earth. It was making the sin-burdened world part of God's one great house. It meant that every human being was dear to the heart of God, and that every human being had something in him that could be made Godlike. It meant that the sorrows of this world were taken up and wrapped round with divine sympathies. It meant that the sinfulness of the world was no longer to be left to its own struggles, penalties, and despairs, and that human aspirations were no longer to waste and wear themselves out in fruitless and disappointing efforts. That was the joy-giving significance of the incarnation. God had once for all come close to man, to share all things with him, to infuse divine strength into his weakness, and to carry forward a redeeming work until earth should be made like heaven.

When the glory of the Lord appeared in the sky that night, that is, when heaven touched the earth on that birthnight, those who saw and felt it were sore afraid. It was a new and unusual thing. For heaven had been so distant, shadowy, and ghostlike heretofore. They were afraid of the glory, they thought there must be terrors behind it. To-day it suggests nothing but tender and glad thoughts. For the coming of Jesus has changed everything. It has made heaven new and brought it nearer. The once distant heaven has stooped down and enfolded the earth in a mysterious splendour. The God who was

a cold, severe, unapproachable being has become a father with kind face and encircling arms. The life of man which was but a limping pilgrimage to the grave, has become an upward march to ever higher glories. Our human nature has been surprised with a revelation of its own divinity. The grave which was man's final and eternal resting-place has been changed into the gateway of immortal hope, and our earthly affections, which before were only like transitory spring flowers, have become tree-rooted in the heart of God, to abide and bring forth richer fruit for ever. And so every thought of Jesus and His coming, every thought of the incarnation suggests good tidings of great joy.

2. These words which the angel spoke were but anticipations of the words with which Jesus Himself has made us familiar. They were His favourite words. He might have borrowed them from the angel, or more likely given them to the angel in advance. We hear from His own lips continually :—“Fear not.” He meets us at every turn of life with that cheery invocation. He passed through His ministry day by day repeating it. It was the watchword of His journey and warfare. The disciples heard it every time they were troubled, cast down, and afraid. When they fell at His feet trembling, He lifted them up with the words “fear not !” When their ship was sinking in the storm, they heard the cry “fear not !” When they shivered at the thought of all the foes and dangers which awaited them, there came reassur-

ance with the voice, "Fear not, little flock." When He was leaving them, one of His last words was: "Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid." He has been speaking that word ever since. He came to speak it. He came to deliver man from those fears. He smiles upon our fears to-day. He almost laughs them away in the sunshine of His power and confidence. The incarnation is God's answer to human gloom, despondency, and pessimism. What are you afraid of, it says: Am I not with you always to the end? and all power in heaven and earth is given unto Me. You are afraid of your sins?—Fear not! I am able to save to the uttermost. You are afraid of the world, the flesh, and the devil?—Fear not! I have overcome the world, and cast out the prince of the world. You are afraid of your own weakness?—Fear not! all things are possible to him that believeth. You are afraid of life's changes and uncertainties?—Fear not! the Father hath given all things into My hands. You are afraid of death and bereavement?—Fear not! I have conquered and abolished death. You are afraid of all the ominous signs of the times, the perils of religion and the shakings of the Church?—Fear not! I am the first, the last, the almighty, and the rock against which the gates of hell shall not prevail. It is always that word you hear when Jesus speaks. It is the word which the angel spoke at His birth-hour, and which He is evermore repeating: Fear

not, for behold I bring you good tidings of great joy. Shake off your fears all this Christmas time, rise above the prevailing depressions, lift up the heads which hang down, say to them that are of a fearful heart—Be strong, be not afraid, remember the angel's words.

3. Fearlessness and great joy are Christ's gift to the world. Fear goes out and joy comes in with Him. And it is not merely promised joy, deferred joy, but joy realised now—a large measure of it at least. One of the happiest changes which has come over our religious ideas in recent times is this: that our religion has assumed a more practical shape, a more distinctly human and homely shape and colouring. It is not less divine, but it is more distinctly human. It does not look less to the world above and beyond, but it looks more to the world that now is. People used to fall back upon heavenly happiness because they despaired of earth, they thought that joy could never be found on earth. We read the mind of Christ better when we interpret His mission as bringing joy to earth and to this present life. It was not merely to show us heaven opening out on the far-off horizon, in the dreary, hidden region which stretches beyond the portals of the grave; but to let down heaven upon our daily path and to give us a taste of heaven's joys amid our common earthly food. He came to show us that God's joy is not confined to the atmosphere which encircles His throne, but may be found by those who walk about

His footstool. He came to prove to us that those who understand God best and love Him most will have joy themselves and help to spread it everywhere. And indeed one lesson that we learn from Christmas is that joy is not far from any one of us, though there are so many that hardly ever taste it. It is never far from us. We can take and give it easily. It is not in heaven that we should climb for it. It is not across the seas that we should travel to find it. It is here. It does not need great wealth or great wisdom. It only needs a childlike heart, a quiet trust, a freedom from envy and guile, a simple leaning upon God's tender care, and a power of living a little more in the lives of others. If you have these things you have joy. Where honest faith is joy comes. Where love abounds there is always abounding joy. It is the language of unbelief and selfishness and despair which says this world must needs be miserable, and that the majority of the human race must needs be unhappy. There is no needs must about it. You have only to increase human love and you increase tenfold human joy.

Think how much of heaven just a little of Christ's spirit among men can produce! The spirit of Christ is stirred up in men about Christmas, and behold what widespread joy it makes. We entertain Christ for a time, we make room for Him, we think some of His thoughts just for a season, we are kind to one another for His sake, we let our sympathies, pities, and charities abound, and behold it puts gladness

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into millions of hearts and makes this world brighter for everyone. If it were always so with us and with other men, this very earth would become, in spite of its changes and sorrows, like the threshold of heaven, with echoes of the higher songs ever ringing. And it was to fashion the world after that pattern that Jesus came.

There is joy for you and there is joy for us all if we will let Christ come in, if we will let Him take full possession, if we will give Him a free hand and a firm rule in our lives. Let Him drive out all our evil spirits which frighten peace and blessedness away. Let Him expel all our envies, malice, and worrying discontent. Let Him subdue and cast out the sin which is the real kill joy in our lives. Let Him fill us with trust and patience, charity and gratitude. Let Him make our hearts as cram full of love as was His heart. And then we shall not know ourselves, we shall be so wondrously beautiful. We shall hardly know the world, it will be so delightfully changed, but we shall understand, for the first time in our lives, what this word of the angel truly meant, "Fear not, for behold I bring you good tidings of great joy."

HIS LIMITLESS KINGDOM

(*Christmas*)

“He shall be great, and shall be called the Son of the Highest : and the Lord God shall give unto the throne of His father David : and He shall reign over the house of Jacob for ever ; and of His kingdom there shall be no end.”—LUKE i. 32-33.

THE prediction was spoken to the woman whom all men call blessed, because through her God became incarnate, and gave His best gift to the world. It was spoken of the child not yet born. It did not tell her all that we know. Possibly the angel who brought the message did not know more than he told, that she was to be the mother of the Jewish Messiah, the longed-for king who would reign over the house of Israel for ever. It was as much as she could bear to know. It was far more indeed than she could take in. She heard it with a cry of incredulity. How shall this be? It seemed wilder than the wildest dream that a woman of such low degree should be made mother of the highest and the kingliest of the sons of men. If we had seen the child in His lowly cot, or seen Him in His obscure

home in Nazareth, we should have thought it a wilder dream. Nay, if we had followed His earthly course through all His rejections, and failures, and final humiliation, we should have said again, It is a dream, a fantasy, a vision of delirium! How can this man sit on the throne of David, or win any sort of Kingdom, great or small? Yet what fools we are and blind to measure God's predictions with our scant tape measures, and write upon them glibly that senseless and cowardly word impossible! The dream has been fulfilled and far exceeded. The angel claimed not too much for the child, but incomparably too little. The vision of a Jewish king has been overshadowed and pushed out by the vaster throne over human hearts which He has built up for Himself; and the only part of the prediction which comes up to the reality is the closing word of it. Of His kingdom there shall be no end, no boundaries, no finis. It shall encroach and annex and advance for ever, until it girdles and sceptres the whole earth.

That may well furnish a text for thought on this day, which, by common consent, we call His birthday, for Christmas Day is a sort of lifting up and enthroning of Jesus. It is a recognition of the power and sway which He has gained. People all over the world think of Him to-day, and speak of Him with some measure of adoration on their lips. Millions of men crown Him with their heart's dearest love, and countless millions give Him honour who have not yet learned to give Him love. People of

every race, colour, and clime, people who speak three or four hundred different languages, are all turning their thoughts towards the manger of Bethlehem and the wonderful birth which had its scene there. They are all doing homage to Him, kneeling to put some sort of crown on His head, making some acknowledgment of His right to rule and reign, and thanking God that He came into the world. The whole earth is girdled with His praise to-day from the frozen zones to the burning plains of the equator, and if we could merely count the number of people to whom Christmas has become a sacred festival, it would be an amazing revelation of the majesty and extent of His kingdom.

I am well aware that the increase of His government cannot be expressed in figures. Spiritual forces defy statistics. Christ's power is felt in a thousand places where He is not recognised, and it is recognised in a thousand places where He is not allowed to rule. Millions call Him Lord and Master who take care that He shall not be what they call Him. And some few make Him their Master who are reluctant to confess Him with their lips. It does not carry us far to be told how many nominal Christians there are in the world; yet that is not to be despised. It is some index of the sway which He wields.

For if men acknowledge Him in any way, and repeat His name with reverence; if they breathe the air in which His thoughts are moving; if they merely touch the fringe of His garments—their lives are in

some degree controlled and shaped by His power. And it would be impossible to count the souls which have borrowed virtue from Him in that way. His government is unceasingly spreading out. Never before has Christ's name been honoured by so many lips, chanted in so many songs, and invoked in so many prayers as now. Never before in the world's history has He had so many heralds and witnesses engaged in spreading His faith and holding up His person to view, and never before has He attracted to Himself so much worship and won so much impassioned love and obedience as are given to Him to-day. There is not a discovered land or island in which His name has not been proclaimed; not a tribe, race, or family of men which has not yielded converts to Him, and not one known language in which the story of His life and death has not been told. His name is always on the ascending scale. Other names decline and lose their potency. Other kingdoms wax and wane and disappear like fading stars. Other religions have their golden days in the past, and have no promise of a future. Mahomedanism is becoming decrepit, Buddhism is losing its hold of entire nations. The awakening East is slowly turning away from its ancient faiths to be schooled by the Christian West. The cross is alone advancing, and holds the inheritance of the future. The faith of Jesus marches on, nineteen hundred years old, yet ever hopeful and vigorous with immortal youth. His name has already been lifted above every name, and still wins all along

the field. And of His kingdom there shall be no end.

It is worth observing that in some respects Jesus has gained ground while some of the things which were called Christian have lost ground. Jesus Himself stands higher than ever, though many a flag which His people waved has been lowered or dropped. Schools, dogmas, systems, and sects have become of small account, whilst He occupies a larger place than ever. The modern world cares comparatively little for the ancient Christian creeds, but it is drawn more powerfully than ever to the central figure of the creeds. The common cry is, We have no interest in your theologies, but we want to see Jesus. I am not sure even that the Church and the churches are held in that high respect which they once enjoyed, and in thousands of minds the authority of the Bible has been weakened by the persistent attacks of critics. Yet through all this, the name of Jesus and the moral mastery of Jesus have been for ever growing. Everything else seems to have been saying to Him, "We must decrease and thou must increase." The agnostic, who flings away every creed, holds on to Him. The multitude, who sneer at the churches, speak of Him with reverential breath. The critic, who tears the Bible to pieces, stops his destructive work at the person and life of Jesus. The very anarchist, who would destroy everything else, quotes Him with affectionate approval. Jesus is lifted above criticism. No man in any company

or any book would dare to speak ill of Him. It is wonderful how, amid all changes and shakings of thought, religious thoughts have become more fixed and immovable about Him. More and more has He been brought to the front as the Master Spirit and the Divine One who has in His hands the destinies of the world. Church creed and priest grow less to make Him supreme, and all movements bear their witness "that of His kingdom there shall be no end."

"And yet when all this has been said, we have only touched the surface of Christ's real power in the world. His Kingdom is for the most part invisible. It is felt but not seen, like the all-pervading air we breathe. It is present everywhere, even where we least look for it, even where the faint-hearted believer would say it is not to be found. Men talk its language and think its thoughts when they fancy they are talking and thinking their own. Its forces throb through all modern life as the tidal forces make the heavings and pulsations of the ocean. It supplies all our best feelings and shapes all our dearest relationships. It enters into all our literature, refines our social usages and shapes our moral codes. It redeems our politics from utter coarseness, it saves the classes and the masses from hopeless estrangement and hatred. It bridges over the awful gulf between rich and poor, provides all our saving ministries, dictates all our charities, and it creates the whole of that kindly brotherly spirit which we all call

humanity, and without which the modern world would be a civilised hell fiercely burning with the fires of envy and selfishness. There are croakers who tell us that the world is continually getting worse, and thus preparing for some final judgment and catastrophe. They point to wars and militarism, to the alienation of class from class, to growing unbelief and apostasies, to political corruption and increasing looseness of morals, to the miseries and degradations of crowded cities, and the gorgeous wealth which cares for nothing but its own prides and lusts. And they say, Where is Christ amid all this? and where is the promise of His coming? And we answer all these croakers by inviting them to look back as well as around them. Take a page out of yesterday, if you would read rightly the pages of to-day. Whatever bad and terrible things there are now, and no Christian wishes to be blind to them, there were incomparably more and worse of these things a hundred or even fifty years ago. Hell has not encroached on Christ's kingdom in these later years, but is everywhere being driven steadily back. There is far more of Christ's spirit and power in our world than the world of our fathers, or any world of the past has known. And now on this birthday of the divine King we avow our belief that He will still and always make more room for Himself, that He is here to be King for ever and at last the only King, and that there is no hope for this poor world save in His absolute supremacy over it. And besides all

that, we confess, concerning ourselves, that we shall never realise the fulness, the strength, and the divinity of living, until we have brought every thought and desire into subjection to Him whose kingdom shall have no end.

A CHILD IN THE MIDST

(*Christmas*)

“And Jesus called a little child unto Him, and set him in the midst of them.”—MATTHEW xviii. 2.

THESE disciples were growing somewhat proud and masterful. They were cherishing ambitious dreams, already portioning out among themselves the kingdom which they thought their master would presently win; they were building castles in the air, and disputing among themselves which of them would occupy the lordliest. There was just a touch of rivalry—a shade of jealousy, a root of bitterness springing up, which, if not checked, would grow into much of trouble. Each one wanted to be greater than his brother. It was just the spirit of the old world, with all its prides, and strifes, and hatreds, and narrow selfishness. It was the spirit which had cursed the world and brought all its wars. And Jesus knew that they would have to unlearn all that, and indeed to unlearn most of what the old world had taught them, before they could be leaders in His new divine kingdom. Ah, yes! what they needed was to go to school again

and commence afresh as children. And He gave them that object lesson which we have never read and never can read without feeling the infinitely pathetic beauty of it. He called a little child unto Him, and set him in the midst of them, and said: Except ye be converted and become as little children, ye shall not enter the kingdom of heaven.

Our Lord constantly repeated that lesson. He esteemed not at all the so-called wisdom of the world, the knowledge of which men were so vain, the prides and the prejudices to which they clung so fiercely, the great names and sounding titles to which they attached such immense importance. A child in his very humility was nearer to the King of kings than the highest of these. A child in his simple ignorance knew the great Father better than the wise and prudent. A child's artless hymn of praise was far more like perfect worship than all the gorgeous ceremonies of the temple. If a man knows far more than a child of some things, he knows far less of the divine simplicities, because he has forgotten them, and to learn them again is the highest wisdom. "Out of the mouths of babes and sucklings thou hast perfected praise." "I thank thee that thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent, and revealed them unto babes." "Of such is the kingdom of heaven."

At Christmas time, especially, we bethink ourselves of those words of His. Our thoughts go out with more than their wonted interest and affection

towards the children, and childhood assumes a peculiar beauty in our eyes because of the Holy One who Himself became a child. Whatever other meanings this sacred festival may have, this perhaps is the most prominent thought of it. Once a year a divine child is set in the midst of us. Incarnate God and yet a little child. One who grew up to a perfect man and to possess all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge, yet never left behind, as we do, the things which make childhood attractive. One who was called by His disciples to the last, "Thy holy child Jesus." Once a year this child is set in the midst, and we gather round Him praying and rejoicing, and refresh our hearts with visions of childhood's purity and bliss. We sit at His feet to be taught, and we hear Him saying: "In malice be ye children, but in understanding men."

All grown-up people at some time or other have longed for or dreamed of a return to childhood, and sighed as they realised the impossibility of it. Imagination speeds back through the tearful years to revisit those cloudless scenes and drink again of the purer wells that spring up laughing at the child's feet, and the heart cries out like David: "O that one would give me to drink of the water of the well of Bethlehem which is by the gate." The old old story of Eden and its closed gates is the history of every soul. We have all left a paradise with its glistening streams, and gold and bdellium, and see the sentinel angel at the gates forbidding our return.

The poetry of all nations places the golden age in the past, and the golden age is but the poet's recollection of his own happy childhood. There was a time, said Plato, who believed that men had had a previous existence—there was a time when we lived a life of purity, and saw things with clearer vision, and were not blinded and enslaved by ignorance and prejudice, and chains of habit and of sin; and the whole aim of the wise man should be to get to that state and regain the clearer vision and the purity. And Wordsworth, in one of his finest poems, writes: "Heaven lies about us in our infancy, but as we grow older, the shades of our prison-house close about us, and hide it from the view," and the endeavour of the soul should be to break through those shades into heaven's clear light again. We have lost the charms of childhood, we miss its tender graces, its bright, fearless faith, its unconsciousness of evil, and many a time we feel that we could willingly give up all that we have gained if we might be made as a little child again. Truly the lessons which we most need to learn are just those which are breathed forth from the artless lips and shouted in the innocent delights of a happy, hopeful child. And so to-day, or at least at Christmas time, the child Jesus seats Himself in the midst and speaks to us. He bids the doctors depart, and the sages be silent, and the world's science hold its lips, and the din of politics hush itself, and the clamours of prejudice and passion be still, that we may take in His heavenly teaching of faith, and innocence, and joy.

Every other day throughout the year our masters and preachers and leaders, our men of light and leading, our wise and prudent men, are urging us to learn, to fill ourselves with the fruits of knowledge, to learn more of science, of politics, of commerce, of books; more of the world, to learn more, they say, and be henceforth stronger and abler and happier. But on Christmas Day alone we hear another voice bidding us *unlearn*, and reminding us that wisdom is oftentimes nearer when we stoop than when we soar.

Become a child again, it says, for there is more of heaven in the child's ignorance than in all the wisdom of the schools. It is as if God spoke to each of us. My son, my daughter, you are growing old and cunning and covetous; you must become a child again with My *Son* this blessed birth-time. You are growing old and selfish, you must become a child; you are growing old, and careful, and anxious, and distrustful, and envious, and dissatisfied with the present, and fearful of the future. You must become a child again with a child's sweet, fearless trust. You are growing old and querulous, and croaking, and peevish, and despondent, and weary, drinking life's cup as though all its fresh, glad sweetness were gone. You must become a child again, seeing wonders and charms everywhere, and rejoicing in all the good things which the Lord your God has given you. With your increasing age and experience, there has come too much love of vain distinctions, of bubble reputation,

too much desire for the uppermost seats and the world's treacherous favours, too many class prejudices, and social rivalries, and dislikes, and jealousies, and hatreds, great quickness in discerning evil, not promptness enough in recognising good; much affectation, and little simplicity; much love of show, and too little of reality. You have exchanged the child's charity, which believes all things, for the man's scepticism, which doubts all; the child's openness and transparency for the man's secrecy and guile; the child's downright honesty for the man's astuteness; the child's sense of wonder and unbounded admiration for the man's cold criticism and the cynic's sneer; the child's belief in heaven's nearness for the man's doubting suspicion as to whether there be a heaven at all. Oh! it were worth all things to become a child again. If there were any market where we could sell half our stock of knowledge and experience, and buy back the mind of a child, which of us would not rejoice in the exchange! So God speaks to us through the life of that child in the midst.

There are times when we get a little weary of all the grand talk about knowledge, and genius, and brilliant statesmanship, and the march of science and invention, and the cleverness of human foresight, and the omniscience of intellect, and the victories won over material forces, and the triumphs of civilisation, and the cunning of worldly men. We have a suspicion that it is not doing for us all that the boasters say, that civilisation does not quite mean paradise, and

that grasp of mind is not the same thing as rest of soul. Science has made us richer, but I am not sure that it has made us happier. It has given us more luxuries, and, alas, more hunger and unsatisfied desires. It has brought the distant stars into our field of vision, and put heaven further off. It has vastly increased our knowledge, and sadly diminished our faith. It has swept away many of our false myths and idols, and perhaps some of our true hopes and dreams. It has exploded our superstitions, and perhaps undermined our reverence. It has gratified our curiosity, but dulled our sense of wonder. It has filled the world with railways and factories, and also with powder, and dynamite, and guns. It has proclaimed the solidity and unity of men, and turned Europe into a huge armed camp. It has made splendid cities, and established political rights, and given us also the miseries of the slums, and the anarchist with his bombs. It has made us as gods, knowing good and evil—knowing, alas, far too much of evil—and it has made our nerves and hearts like strings too much stretched, which are ever ready to break. It is of no use quarrelling with all this. We can never lose again the treasures which intellect has gathered, nor would we if we could. But the understanding and science of the age will be but a huge unfeeling machine unless the heart of a child nestle at the centre of it, and looks out through its wheels with pure, tender, believing eyes. And therefore we will sit down at the feet of the child Jesus, and pray

together that science may learn His humility, that intellect may have His reverence, that commerce may drink from His wells of purity and justice, that riches may clothe themselves with His simplicity and be filled with His self-denying spirit, that education and enlightenment may have their cold, freezing light made warm and gentle with His love, and that the nations as they ring the bells in honour of His nativity may bethink themselves of the spirit of the divine child whom they worship, and gather from His simple innocence lessons of sublimest wisdom.

For truly the wisdom of this world might well be laughed at by a child. Here are nations keeping twelve millions of men under arms and taxing themselves to the verge of desperation to support them. Here are Italy, Spain, Portugal, Greece, and others, reduced to bankruptcy in the vain effort to appear greater than they are. Here are the United States stricken with a commercial paralysis, and with thousands in their cities vainly crying for work because of the high tariffs by which they selfishly hoped to enrich themselves. Here are the South American Republics often bleeding to death in civil strife of which nobody knows the cause. Here is the world cram full of wealth, of capital, of labour, of productive land, with such a superabundance of food, clothing, and every material good that it lies rotting and decaying in granaries, and stores, and ports, and so little knowledge, and so much selfish blindness in the distribution of it, that millions of mouths are hungry, and millions

of bodies half clothed. The most foolish child could not misarrange and blunder over the business of life more utterly than this. Truly, a little child would teach us better things. It is as if God were mocking at our wisdom and saying to us: There is a child in the midst, humble yourselves and learn of Him. Ah, yes, would that the foolish nations might learn of Him. And let us also pray that we may learn of Him. Help us, O Christ, to put on the child again. Help us to rejoice like a child in all good things without anxious thought of to-morrow or fretful discontent with to-day. Let our sympathies, and pities, and charities be as easily moved and as overflowing as a child's. Let us bury our enmities and forget our jealousies as easily as doth a child, and have much of the charity which thinketh no evil and is ready to believe the best of everyone. Let us be full of the child's hopefulness, which sees no clouds in the future, and let us believe with a child's implicit faith that the great God loves us as He loved His own dear Son. Let the child Jesus, the true Santa Claus, carry us into a fairy realm of innocent delight, where love's sweet kisses and hope's evergreens shall give us a foretaste of that everlasting home, which keeps festival for ever, and where the heart is always young.

GOD'S UNSPEAKABLE GIFT

(*Christmas*)

"Thanks be unto God for His unspeakable gift."—2 COR.
ix. 15.

THE chapter which thus terminates in a word of profound gratitude and impassioned joy, is all about giving. It is the announcement and appeal which precede a collection. The box is going round on behalf of the poor saints at Jerusalem, and there is the customary sermon leading up to it, an exhortation to liberality. It is a very practical homily, with no flights of eloquence, and no touches of pathos and emotion until the end is reached, and then for an instant the apostle lets himself go. I ask for your offerings in the name and memory of all that you have received. Think how rich redemption has made you, and let that enlarge your hearts. Thanks be unto God for His unspeakable gift. He does not tell us what that is, and there is no need to tell us. There is no need for us to discuss the question. We know at once what he meant. The thought which was in his mind springs unbidden into every Christian mind. There is only one meaning possible. The

gifts of God are manifold, various as His promises, innumerable as His mercies ; but there is one which overtops, overshadows them all, and is lifted out of comparison, the gift which defies expression, which makes the heart dumb with wonder, love, and praise, which language cannot utter, which music cannot sing, which art and genius cannot portray, which millions of lips have tried to speak, and stammeringly failed, which baffles human thought and outstrips imagination, the gift which is for all men and for all ages, and which never grows old or loses its value. It is the gift on which the whole of Christendom will have its eyes fixed in the approaching season, the gift which came to us when the word was made flesh, when the mystery of the incarnation took its place in human history, and the angels sung their advent song over the helpless babe who had come from heaven to earth to make all things new. That is what Paul meant, and that is what we irresistibly think of in these words. "Thanks be unto God for his unspeakable gift."

And that, my brethren, is the sentiment which seeks utterance in all the best and sacred thoughts of the Christmas season. It is above all things a festival of thanksgiving, of profound gratitude and pure joy, joy awakened or created by the contemplation of God's kindness to us in the gift of His only begotten Son. We try to estimate the value of the gift, we attempt a sort of stock-taking of the moral and spiritual wealth which it has conferred upon us, we

think of all that it has become to us, and all that it is to the world. But words and thoughts alike fail us. The debt is immeasurable, we can only exclaim with St Paul: "Thanks be unto God for His unspeakable gift!" We think of it:

1. As the universal gift. It is God's gift to all, without limits and without respect of persons. It is the light which lighteneth every man that cometh into the world, God's love-token to every human being that lives and breathes. It is not like other gifts, halved by dividing, thinned by distribution. It multiplies itself like the miraculous loaves, gains increase by scattering, becomes more to each one as it is shared by all, doubles itself by division, and is taken away from him who would keep it all to himself. It is intended for everyone, and in a measure it reaches everyone. It is unlike all other gifts in this, that it forces itself on those who reject it, it imparts healing to those who fling it from them, blesses those who curse it, and does good to them that despitefully use it. Wherever Jesus comes, all lives are made richer by His coming. Whether they call themselves Christians or not, they have a share in His bounties. The veriest unbelievers touch the hem of His garments and unconsciously steal virtue from Him. They breathe the purer atmosphere which He has created, they benefit by the juster laws which He has suggested and shaped, they find themselves steeped in the sentiments of pity and human kindness which have flowed from Him. His

love shed abroad in many hearts goes out in gentle waves of influence towards all hearts. His hand is upon every sufferer. His healings are found in every place of disease and pain. His light shines in every prison. His whispers of hope are heard by every criminal. His promises are wafted into every chamber of sickness and death. Through all this land and in every scene and society we can hear the faint tread of Jesus' feet. Everywhere His touch makes burdens lighter. His unseen presence breathes uplifting. His thoughts are embodied in innumerable acts of mercy. His words illumine despair, and everywhere there is the shining of His cross. It is a boon which sweetly forces itself upon all men, whether they will or not. "Thanks be unto God for His unspeakable gift!" We think of it as:

2. The gift which glorifies us all, our human nature and the world about us. For when God gave His son to us, He promoted us all to sonship. The grandest feature in the incarnation is its revelation to each human heart of the divine fatherhood, of the ties which bind us to the eternal, and of the divine pity and love which are ever seeking to save us. It meant, and still means, that in God's sight man was a creature of inestimable value, worth saving at infinite cost, the cost of divine searching, humiliation, suffering, and tears. It meant that each man was worth the redeeming price of a cross. The gift of Jesus therefore furnished ground for the loftiest hopes which the human heart can cherish. It wrote the

coming story of humanity in golden lines, in the rising notes of a grand ascension song. It reminded man of what he had forgotten altogether—that he was a creature of no mean lineage, a child of God, with an inheritance incorruptible and fading not away, master of the present, and heir of the future, with royalty on His brow, and eternity in His heart, bound fast to Almighty care and 'love from which neither death nor life, nor things present, nor things to come can separate Him.

And all of us who believe in the incarnation must take this view of ourselves and our fellow-men. We see ourselves magnified in the face of Jesus. We walk in the light of a new creation which transfigures us. The human is wedded to the divine and endowed with all that makes the choicest wealth of the divine. We are joint heirs with Him, waiting to be crowned with Him, sin and the brute in man vanquished, Christ and the divine in man victorious, and mortality swallowed up in life. For that is all implied in the perfected humanity of Jesus. The fact that Deity has once tabernacled in a human form, that heaven's glory has been able to shine through a human body, and God's dearest thoughts to pass through a human mind, invests all the race with honour, dignity, and beauty, unimaginable. And the kindred fact that He came to save all, that He loved and pitied all, that He gave Himself freely to all, that there was not one whom He despised or despaired of, not one from whom

He turned with loathing, that they were all dear to Him, however low fallen and stained. These are thoughts which need only to be grasped to put us all on a mount of transfiguration where we see ourselves and each other in a heavenly light with garments white and glistening. In the coming of Jesus we are all made new and larger creatures. Christ's birthday was the birthday of the whole human race to a life divine. "Thanks be unto God for His unspeakable gift." We think of it as:

3. A gift which inspires in us perpetual and quenchless hope. Hope for ourselves and hope for all the world. Christmas day, for all who understand its meaning and who keep in memory its central fact, comes always with hope on its wings. There is something of the child's face upon it to all men. It speaks to us as a child's face speaks of better things to come. There is hardly a man, woman, or child who does not feel his heart a little lightened and brightened by hope when this season is upon us. A gleam of sunshine passes over every field of human doubts and fears, when the Christmas bells are ringing and the songs of peace and goodwill are heard. The season often comes amid sad scenes. It breaks in upon us when the sky is overclouded in more senses than one, when troubles are upon a nation, when anxieties and misgivings make the air heavy, and many hearts are ready to yield to depression. It comes sometimes in the thick of disaster with gloom over every heart and a throb

of pain in the whole nation's heart—it comes to us sometimes with that heaviness a little lightened, yet with many fears still brooding. But whenever it comes it brings with it a sweet breath of hope. It paints our sky with colours of promise. It whispers to us the word Immanuel, God with us, and we feel that all must and shall be well. And Christmas does for us what Jesus is always doing for the weary and despondent heart of the world. Were it not for Him we should certainly lose the priceless boon of hope. It would slowly leave us and hide itself in clouds, while we groaned out a last sad farewell. There is not much in the present condition of the world to fill our hearts with buoyant glad expectations of the future—not much in the way of prophetic promise to paint the coming days with roseate hues. The last year has been a year of unrest, strife, troubles, confusion. The world full of tumults and cruelties, fierce human passions and sins; and the new year will come to us with doubt, uncertainty, and manifold fears written on its face. There is no clear outlook, no promise of a speedy millenium. The wisdom of the wise fails, the craft of statesmen is no better than folly. There are no trusted prophets and no born leaders; and there is a mass of corruption, licentiousness, practical atheism, and low ideals, enough to make the unbelieving heart shiver with dread. Yet now and ever we who know the gift of God dismiss all faint fears. We fall back upon the Christmas thought of Immanuel, and the

darkness becomes light. Hope renews itself for ever at the mention of Jesus' name. When all other wise men and leaders fail we have the great Captain who came to conduct the human host to its glorious end. He who gave Himself once for all to the world goes on pledged and bound to the world with saving power for ever. Through all delays He marches and carries all things with Him to the perfect day. The future belongs to Him and therefore it must open out into fields of glorious light. He is the light shining in every dark place, the voice that sings always golden songs of promise; the creator and renewer of immortal hopes. Christ in us, Christ in the world, the Hope of Glory. "Thanks be unto God for His unspeakable gift."

4. And lastly, we think of this gift as every precious thing in one to those who know it best and trust the giver most. To the warm, fresh, loving, Christian heart it is indeed the gift unspeakable, immeasurable beyond all reckoning. It is everywhere in our lives—it fills out our lives. Without it we could hardly imagine what our lives would be. It is the gift which makes all other gifts more precious. Without it wealth would only be an anxious burden, a corrupting idolatry, a terrible snare. Without it friendships would only be a precarious possession; ambition only a naphtha torch-light leading the way to ashes and despair. Without it human love would be a mockery, and the sight of every child's face would suggest a

thought of pain. Without it sorrow would be intolerable, disappointment maddening, and the grave a perpetual terror.

It underlies all our purest joys; it creates all our sweetest sympathies. It strengthens all our affections. It is the hope which includes all hopes. If we lost this gift we should wish we had never been born. If we had never had it we should never have learned to live at all.

We cannot tell what Jesus is to us. It is something beyond all thought now. I do not think we shall ever know fully—not even when the eternal life has disclosed to us its secrets. We shall only be able to say then, as we say now, "Thanks be unto God for His unspeakable gift."

GOD WITH US

(Sunday after Christmas)

“And shall call His name Immanuel.”—ISAIAH vii. 14.

OUR religious thoughts run in two channels to-day. We are still in the Christmas season. We are full of its sacred memories, and the music of its songs and the mirthful voices of its festive hours are yet lingering in our ears. We cannot quite dismiss it if we would, and turn abruptly to graver themes. Yet this particular day has other suggestions. The happiest festival of the year falls near the close of the year. And now we are keeping its last Sabbath. The figure of Time armed with his scythe seems to creep up close behind the rosy, jovial form of Father Christmas, and before we have done with the rejoicings, we are invited to muse on the passing years, and to review the way in which our God has led us. One hardly knows, then, what keynote to strike this morning—whether to talk to you about

Bethlehem and the manger and the lessons of the nativity, or to ask you to look back and forward and think of the providential love which is bearing you safely through all life's changes. But whichever of the two directions our thoughts take, the text which I have read to you will serve. This text contains all that is holiest and best in Christmas memories, and it reminds us also of that great inspiring and sustaining truth which has been the strong foundation and uplifting hope of the saints throughout all generations, and is our confidence and support as we review the past and anticipate the future. "Thou shalt call His name Immanuel," says the prophet, writing of the coming king, "Immanuel! which, being interpreted, means God with us." And the evangelist St Matthew, speaking of Jesus, declares that the prediction has been fulfilled in Him.

In a literal way it has not been fulfilled. Our Lord never called Himself by that name, nor did the disciples ever apply it to Him, nor has the Christian Church chosen that descriptive title of the Master as its habitual and favourite one. In fact, the name Immanuel is only mentioned once in the whole of the New Testament writings, and when we speak of Him, it is not generally in that way, but by some better known and perhaps dearer word. And yet in the interpretation of this name lies the most precious of all Christian truths and the divinest fact in the world's history. Though He has not been usually called Immanuel, all His servants and followers have

felt that the word was the fullest and happiest expression of what Jesus has been to them, of what Jesus has been to the world, of what Jesus is always to them who walk in His light and live by His love. "Immanuel, God with us."

Really you cannot get beyond that or above it. It is the great divine mystery; it is the sublimest human philosophy. To a Christian it brings the one profound joy of living and the one sweet trust in dying.

I. We may well say first, that all our best Christmas thoughts are summed up in this word. We think of the holy child not simply as heaven's gift to the world, but as the coming down of heaven itself into the world. The world which gave the babe such scant welcome was receiving all-unconsciously its divine guest, taking into its very heart and deepest nature the Almighty lover of men, the Master of all power, the source of all joy, the moral and spiritual creator and transformer who was henceforth to continue with it and in it until He had subdued and changed it all into His own image. The morn of the nativity was the dawn indeed of a new creation, for the very life of God had come down into the darkness and sin, and joined itself to human weakness and corruption, never more to leave it until man's dwelling-place should be fashioned into a temple worthy of His presence. "Immanuel, God with us!" That, I repeat, is the most inspiring of Christmas thoughts, and, indeed, of all Christian

thoughts. He came once and for all, not to sojourn, but to abide. It was no brief visit as if heaven had opened for a little while and sent down a beam of celestial light to give men a passing vision of higher things, and had then retired behind the veil again. He came to shine on our lives for evermore. Nothing which happened in His earthly ministry changed that fact. He died. He ascended into heaven. He vanished from all ordinary vision; but He remained still in the sphere of His fleshly sojourn. "Lo, I am with you alway," is the alpha and omega of the incarnation. "Immanuel, God with us!" That is the very meat and drink of our faith. By that we labour, suffer, rejoice, aspire, and die. When the Christmas bells are ringing, that is what their music means—"God with us." The gift that came to the world that first Christmas morning has never been withdrawn for a moment. It is perennial and inexhaustible, new every morning, fresh every evening. When we exchange Christmas salutations, that is always the deepest thought in the Christian heart, when we look into our children's faces and see the light of hope and gladness there, when we clasp warm hands of friendship and kiss the lips of those we love—we feel that all human affections are purified, yes! and made immortal by the fact that we have one with us whose love is eternal, mightier than death, victor over all that is fickle and frail. And again, when we greet all men with good will, and our hearts are like a fountain of kindly senti-

ments, and we think hopefully of the time when all men shall be as brothers, and wrath and bitterness shall be done away ; it is because we recognise unconsciously the presence of one among us to whom all souls are dear, and who is slowly drawing and binding together the hearts of the children of men by the living tendrils of His own sweet sympathies.

Yes indeed, whatever we have at Christmas time which is pure, hopeful, beautiful, and dearly human, springs from the fact that there stands among us unseen that Divine One who was born in Bethlehem, who scattered healing, gladness, peace, wherever He walked, and who still inspires with His kindling breath the hearts of all who touch Him.

“Immanuel, God with us!” It changes all things. It has changed all things. It renews the face of the earth. It paints the sky with heavenly colours. It glorifies each human face. It writes a gospel full of everlasting promise on the growing features of every child. It sets each worn and weary old face in a framework of perpetual youth. It makes gross humanity spiritual and divine, transforms human love into a copy of the eternal heart, and converts the very grave into the entrance chamber of the great king. There is a diviner meaning in everything now, for in everything is written this word “Immanuel.” And these have been among your Christmas thoughts if your thoughts have been the truest and the best.

2. The word comes to us with equal appropriateness as we consider the approaching close of the year. It comes laden with suggestions of gratitude, and musical too with prophetic voices of glad and assuring promise. All of you, who are praying, godly people, must feel that your life's story up to this point is briefly told in the one word—"Immanuel," you can see the word written on all the changing scenes, all the eventful experiences of the course that lies behind. You have often been conscious of the divine hand upon you, and a thousand times when you were not conscious you have discovered afterwards that it was most surely there. Oh yes! in the darkness and the light, in the joy and in the sorrow, in the struggle and in the peace, in smooth waters and in the storm, in your wiser moments and in your moods of waywardness and folly, there has been one with you like unto the form of the Son of Man. He has been there to strengthen your hearts in the face of difficulties, to uphold you in all heaviness and fainting, to renew your hopes in all hours of despondency, to cheer you with His words in all times of gloom, to offer His restful love when you were weary, bind up your wounded hearts when you were bereaved, and turn your faces towards goodness again, whenever the temptations of life inclined you to swerve from His paths. "Immanuel, God with us!"

Do you think that anything less than that, anything short of an encompassing divine presence and

restraining power, would have kept those wayward, erring feet of yours straight? that fickle, treacherous, easily seduced will of yours constant? that poor flickering faith still and ever burning? that fleshly sensuous nature of yours unconquered by its sordid surroundings? Do you not think you would have lost Him altogether in the thick of the world's temptations and the multitude of your own driving lusts and ambitions, if He had not followed you step by step, and clung to you with a tightened grasp that nothing could shake off?

If we are still men and women with some spiritual aims, not wholly corrupted by the world or conformed to it, still looking towards high ideals, undaunted by failure, still pressing on with some holy confidence, it is because our lives have been one long witness of that saving truth, "Immanuel, God with us," because Jesus has been each day verifying to us His promise. "Lo, I am with you always."

And now, with that as our motto, as our watch-word, as the promise intended to meet all changes, as the pledge given to us in all attempted service, as the truth which is to nerve us for all trials, and make us equal to all occasions; we can face cheerfully, bravely, hopefully, whatever may be coming to us out of the unknown year beyond. He who has been as the shadow of a great rock behind, as a covert from the tempest, as a guiding and protecting pillar of fire; He whose angel presence has journeyed with us through many a wilderness, and across many a

divided sea, will just repeat Himself in the story which has yet to be written, before our lives reach their final rest. Immanuel! there is no word like that. God with us. That is the best of all, it leaves nothing wanting.

And that is what we feel not only about ourselves but about the world at large. To believe that it is a world with a living Christ, an Almighty Saviour, working unseen through all its movements, making His spirit to be felt in all the turnings and revolutions and onward marchings of its huge complicated wheels and machinery, to feel that his heart of love is busy amid all the throbbings, and schemings, and cross purposes of the innumerable hearts and minds of men! To have even faith as a grain of mustard seed of that kind, is to be brim-full of certainty that the world and all things in the world are slowly moving towards the better days. We might have gloomy thoughts, we might lend our ears to all sort of dismal Cassandra prophecies about the coming time, if we believed that the world was a sort of forsaken child, whom He visited once in a way and tenderly kissed, some nineteen hundred years ago, and then left, enriched indeed with that one sweet memory, but sad because it could not be repeated. We might despair if we thought that God came and went, that Christ lived and died and vanished. But no thoughts of fear can ever disturb those who believe that the incarnation meant a perpetual fact, a gift never recalled, a power that never ceases to work, a promise

that is always hastening to its fulfilment. There can be no doubt about the future to him whose faith is planted deep in and girded round by this truth of truths, "Immanuel, God with us."

THANKFULNESS AND COURAGE

(The End of the Year)

“He thanked God, and took courage.”—ACTS xxviii. 15.

THESE are words which we often quote, for they express briefly but very suggestively what should be the attitude of a Christian man. They tell us what Paul felt and did on a memorable occasion. A casual observer would have seen little in his circumstances to suggest either thankfulness or hope. He had just landed after a terrible voyage and a disastrous shipwreck, in which he and those who journeyed with him had lost everything but life. And he was on his way to Rome to behold for the first time indeed the glories which had filled his imagination for years. But he was going a prisoner to his trial, to be bound he knew not how long in strict confinement, and then to plead for his life before hard men who had already prejudged his cause, who knew nothing of him, but hated the Christian name. And Appii Forum, to which he had come, was not a place calculated to cheer a pure, high-souled man like Paul. The poet Horace, who was not very squeamish

about such things, paints a picture of it from which even he revolted. It was a sort of gathering place for the criminals and outcasts of the great city, filled with low taverns and vile stews, a scene of squalor and sin, where the Apostle would see nothing but the most sickening sights of human degradation. We should not have been surprised to hear that his heart sank for a moment. But he had a wonderful faculty for seeing the sunnier side of things. He remembered how at every stage of that long journey, which was now nearly over, a supernatural power had guarded and preserved him. The oath of murderous vengeance which the Jews had sworn against him had been frustrated, the storm which had dashed the ship in pieces had left him and his companions uninjured, the viper which had fastened on his hand had been shaken off with impunity. He had found friends in the soldiers who guarded him, and received no little kindness from the barbarous people among whom the shipwreck had cast him. And now at Appii Forum there were Christian brethren waiting to welcome him who had come out from Rome to accompany him on the last stage of the journey, and to tell him of what Christ was doing in that great city. He thought of all that he had escaped by the good hand of God, and then he looked upon the faces of these men, who, though he had never seen them before, were united to him by the dearest sympathies and hopes, and his heart was very full. He forgot past persecutions and perils and the trials which yet

awaited him, and, remembering only the mercies and the promises, "he thanked God and took courage."

And this may well supply us with a watchword for to-day. It suggests the tone and character which our thoughts should take on the last Sabbath of the year, gratitude for the journey past, brave hope in view of the unknown before.

1. First, there is no doubt that thankfulness is one of the main secrets of a good and happy life. A man cannot serve God cheerfully unless he is full of the sense of God's mercies, unless he is thoroughly convinced that God on the whole has dealt kindly, lovingly, and graciously with him. If we do not feel that we have been treated as dear children, we cannot have the childlike trust in God which brings serenity and joy. It is our way of looking at life that makes all the difference between gloom and sunshine. If you look into a shallow pool, you may see the mud at the bottom or the bright heavens reflected on the top. If you look into a human face you may see only the marks of care and pain, or you may see a spiritual light in each feature which hints at unspeakable peace and gladness. So you may look on each day's or each year's experience, and see chiefly its weariness and troubles and losses; or you may see the guiding power and grace which have been in it all, and that view of it will inspire you with a sense of gladness. It was the thankful nature of Paul that made him so happy in his Christian work, so untiring and resolute and undaunted amid its many buffetings and

hindrances and disappointments. He had the sweet knack of throwing off these things, of rising swiftly above them as the mountain eagle lifts itself above the clouds into the clear sunlight. He never dwelt on the dark features of his life. He passed through these as a traveller passes through the shadows on a well-lighted path, and they left only dim pictures in his memory. But the miraculous escapes which he had had, the successes which had attended his ministry, the kindnesses which he had received from friends and lovers, were written in never-fading pictures on his heart and brain, and they helped to confer on him what we call the sunny temper, that blessed cheerfulness in tone and face which not only makes the hardest work easy, but gives to a man an immense attractiveness in the eyes of his fellow-men. He drew men to the Gospel, because he presented the Gospel in a glorious setting of radiant joy. Paul never forgot one kindly or gentle action that was done to him, whether it came from heaven or men. How often do his letters brim over with prayerful acknowledgment of the faith and love and generosity and sympathy which he had witnessed in his converts. Religious thankfulness makes a man lovable and loving towards all. It humanizes and gives a sort of tender warmth and summer glow to all our relationships and sentiments. It refines and elevates the general temper and bearing, and a man who thinks that Heaven has used him coldly and neglectfully is apt to revenge himself by putting on a

grumpy and surly mood towards men. He makes his neighbours pay for God's unkindness. But he who thinks much and joyfully of the divine loving-kindness is ever seeking to repay it by a kindly bearing towards all. In remembering mercies, he remembers many other things, the friends who have been loyal and true, the dear faces and forms that have made his life rich with love. The soul that is alive to the goodness and beauty of the Lord is sensitive to beauty and goodness everywhere. When heaven's dew glistens on our souls it scatters its pearl drops on every living thing. A man cannot be thankful to God without being generous to every child of God. Religious joy is an all-pervading joy. When Bunyan's pilgrim was delivered of his burden, he told the trees and the sky and the running streams about it. It seemed to him that the birds were singing with him, and the very woods and waters joining in his glad music, and he loved every common thing. What man can think of his own redemption without being kind to every thing that breathes? When heaven is beautiful in our eyes it wraps all the world in beauty. It is always good to be near men whose souls are full of the joy of God.

2. And what is perhaps best—the grateful soul is always the hopeful soul. When a man thanks God, he inevitably takes courage. When we raise an Ebenezer, it is not only a memorial of the past, but a stone of witness for days to come. A Christian's backward look helps him to a cheerful forward look.

If God's pillar of fire is behind, it casts its gleams over our heads, far away into the darkness before. God's doings are all of a piece. If love and mercy have woven the web of our lives heretofore, they will work after the same pattern to the end. Paul could face the unknown terrors of Rome without fear, because he had just passed through the milder terrors of the sea without harm. Nero could not be more cruel than the Jews, from whose murderous plots he had recently escaped, and the shield of the Almighty which had defended him thus far would not fail him to the end. We know that God in all the changing experiences of our lives, must and will for ever repeat Himself. That which has been is what will always be; His love and mercy are like the Lord Jesus—the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever. "Because thou hast been my help, therefore in the shadow of thy wings will I rejoice." If we remember how He has kept us from falling, and in times of sorrow filled us with consolation, and in seasons of agony and bereavement saved our hearts from breaking, and in the valley of the shadow of death put His rod and staff underneath to support, there will come to us the cheerful outlook, the confident step of those who pass from one year into another in the light and love of God. We need not ask to see the distant scene, the next step is enough; we need only be assured that the same kindly light which has so graciously guided our wayward feet up to this point, will still lead on, until the darkness

clears away and we reach the presence where the light shines for ever without clouds.

Think of the past, then, as Paul did, and like him be brave of heart. Remember all its bright and golden pages, those in which God's gentle and merciful hand did evidently the main writing. Let all His goodness and mercy pass before you, and not easily pass away from you. Do not think much of that which was done or omitted by your own fickle and feeble will, of your moral failures and broken vows. If these things have been devoutly repented of, it is best to have done with them, not to brood over them, not to unearth them from the graves in which God's forgiveness has buried them; not to go back and chew the cud of memory ruminating on transgressions; best to lose sight of what we have been, in pressing toward the mark. You do not believe that God is for ever reaping up old offences like some peevish, mean, unforgiving, human creature. He tells you that He will forget them, cast them into the depths of the sea, and bids you do the same. Do not visit the old burnt-out craters of life. Look away from them up to the sunlit mountains. Think of the bright things before, not of the dark things behind. Think most of the things for which you can thank God, and not of the things which cause shame and regret.

And do not linger long on the pages which record losses, pains, frustrated hopes, unanswered prayers, for you may be sure that these pages compose but

a small proportion of the whole. Turn them over quickly, as Paul was accustomed to do, and let your eyes rest joyfully on the many more pages which are written in letters of light and gold. In my album there are just a few faces, a very few faces, which I cannot look upon with any deep joy. They belong somehow to my life, and I cannot put them out, but they recall nothing but bitter memories and disappointments, and I turn over the leaves hurriedly when I come to them, and I do not want any one to ask me whose faces they are. But the volume, as a whole, is a treasure of sweet and touching memories. So much of truth and goodness, and affection, and tender recollection are suggested by the bulk of those dear, dear portraits, that I am never tired of pointing to them, and thinking of the bright, blessed hours of friendship and communion with which they are associated. And each year of our lives, when rightly reviewed, is like an album of that kind. Has there not been much in this year to give you feelings such as Paul expressed? It has been for you all a year of mercy, if you will but read its records with illumined eyes. It has given you songs in the daytime, and perhaps some songs in the night-time of pain. It has seen, perhaps, some prosperity, and certainly a multitude of divine bounties. Children have become more dear to you. Love has been strengthened and purified. You have been enriched with many new experiences. You have found new and true friends. Some of you have won the prizes

of life, some enjoyed its honours. All of you, I trust, have been preserved from the ever-pressing temptations which try religious faith, and drag a man's upward look down to the low level of a materialistic world. And though here and there the year goes out leaving behind it homes darkened with death, and lonely hearts wandering through vacant chambers seeking in vain for the vanished form, yet even to them is given one vast, great hope and golden promise of reunion, which they do not yet realise in all its fulness, but which will flood their path with sunshine not many days hence.

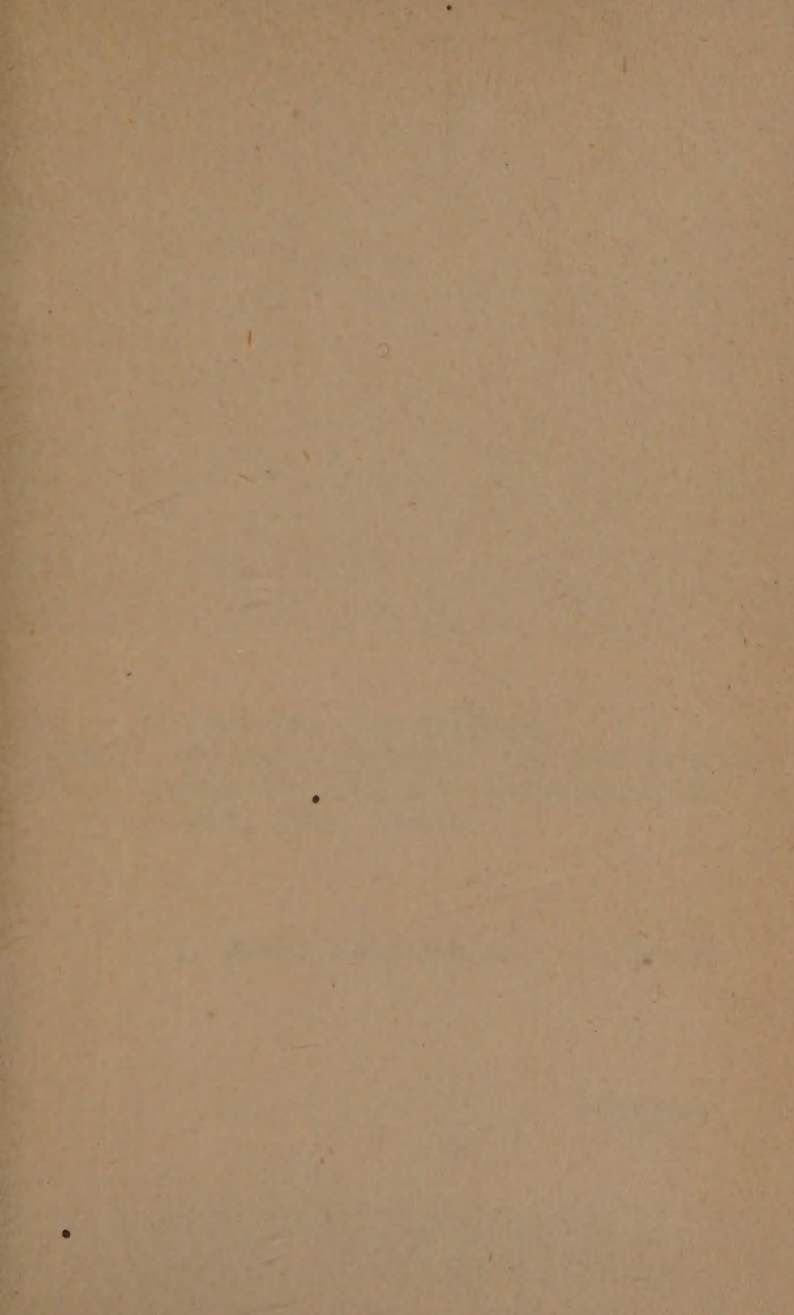
These, then, brethren, are the memories which you should cherish to-day. And memories of this sort will inspire you with courage. For whatever life may have yet to show you, it will show you no place and scene in which the love and goodness which have sustained you in the past will not be found again preparing for your victory.

Make this your watchword—"He thanked God and took courage."

THE END.

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